



Children's Law Center
Annual Report 2014

Table of Contents

- Our Work..... **2**
 - Family..... 2
 - Health..... 4
 - Education..... 6
- Pro Bono..... **8**
- Policy..... **10**
- Staff..... **12**
- Boards..... **14**
- Institutional Donors..... **16**
- Individual Donors..... **18**
- Financials..... **24**

Note: We work hard to protect the confidentiality of our clients and have changed some names as identified in the text. All other details in the stories shared within this report are true.

We fight for DC's children.



DC can be a tough place to grow up. Today, too many children are growing up afraid because they are abused and neglected. Too many children are getting sick because their landlords refuse to clean up the roaches, rats or toxic mold infesting their apartments and triggering their asthma. And, too many children are languishing day after day in classrooms without the support they need to learn.

Children's Law Center fights for these children every day of the year.

Sometimes our impact is hugely visible. Children's Law Center was the architect of historic special education reform passed by the DC Council in 2014, helping shape new laws so the 13,000 District children with physical, emotional and learning disabilities can have the education they need to succeed. I gladly accepted an appointment to help DC's new mayor, Muriel Bowser, think through how her public safety priorities could prevent violence by investing in youth. We also championed children's mental health reforms to help children recover from trauma, with regular mentions in the *Washington Post* and other leading media. Through these efforts and so much more, our policy advocacy delivered real change for DC's children in 2014.

Oftentimes our impact is just as big – but visible mostly to the small circle of adults in a struggling child's life.

In 2014, I am proud that our lawyers, social workers and other dedicated staff helped 1 out of every 8 children in DC's poorest neighborhoods – reaching more than 5,000 children and families.

You can meet some of these families on the following pages. Michelle, who we met in foster care after her mother had died. Renee and her son Derek, who was bounced from classroom to classroom because teachers couldn't manage his ADHD. And Mariana and her two young children, who struggled to stay awake in school because they were tormented by bed bugs every night.

The good news is that these children are now thriving. The transformation in their lives may not have made the morning news, but it is visible to the families who are raising them, the teachers and coaches at their schools, and the pediatricians they see at their neighborhood clinics. The same is true for the thousands of other children we met last year.

I am also honored that we are the trusted partners of the judges, pediatricians and families who turned to us to be the voice for Michelle, Renee, Mariana, and so many more families.

If you've met us, you know that we won't quit until every child in DC can grow up having what all children need to thrive: a loving family, good health and a quality education. It's because of you – our donors, supporters and partners – that we continue to deepen our impact.

Thank you for your continued support of DC's children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Judith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Judith Sandalow
Executive Director

Our Work

We help kids and adults form permanent, loving families.

When children are in a loving, stable family, they thrive. But today there are thousands of DC children who are abused and neglected or threatened by family violence and conflict. Children's Law Center is the voice for these kids.

We are appointed by judges to advocate for children in foster care – and we fight for the education and health care they need to thrive while we help them find a permanent home. When children are caught in bitter parental disputes, we work to shield them from conflict and help families agree on a plan to support their children's well-being. And, when parents can no longer safely care for their children, we help grandparents and other caring adults who step up to give them a home, whether through adoption, custody or guardianship.

In 2014, our attorneys helped over 2,700 children and caring adults create more stable families.

Michelle's Journey to Adulthood

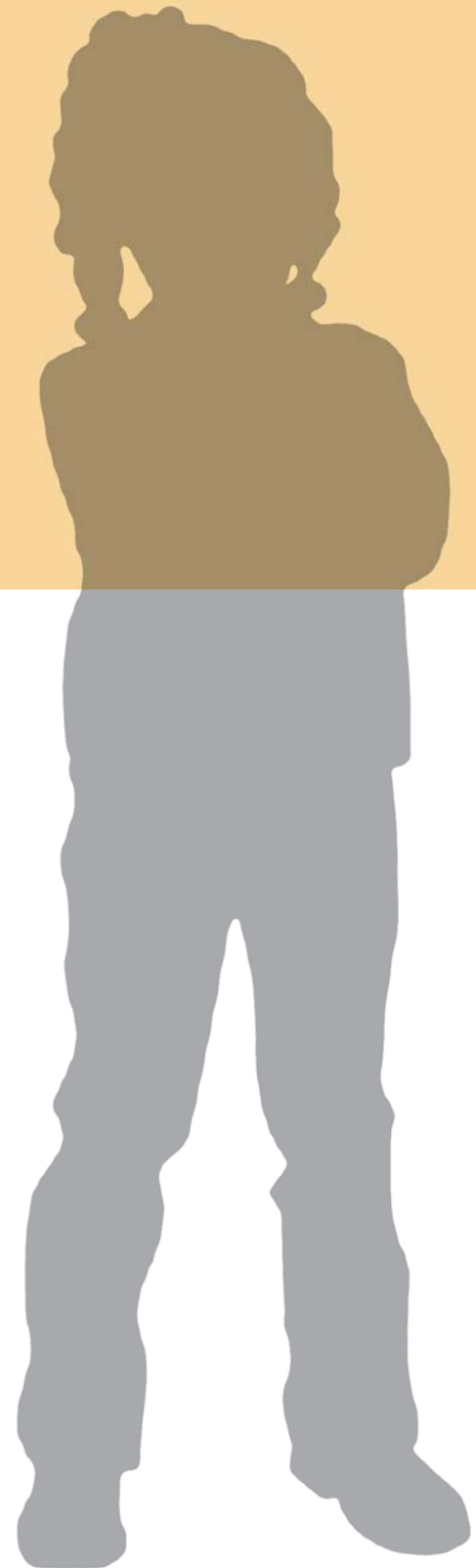
"No matter what you've been through, as long as you stay focused and you believe in yourself, you can overcome it." That's the advice that 20-year-old Michelle gives kids who are growing up in foster care today.

It's advice that she gives from the heart, based on her own experience.

Michelle spent almost half of her young life in foster care. When she was 12, her mother died of breast cancer. Because the illness had been kept a secret, Michelle was completely shocked when her mother died. The most important person in her life was suddenly gone.

Her father, who had a long history of substance abuse, couldn't care for her so she ended up living informally with an older sister. Understandably, Michelle was overwhelmed by grief and shock. Living with her sister didn't go well.

Michelle says she wasn't easy to live with at the time. "I would argue, say stuff like you're not my mom, I don't have to listen to you," she says. Looking back, she says what she really needed was guidance, love and some family consistency. But consistency would take many years to come. The increasing conflict with her older sister caused Michelle to end up in a foster home at the age of 13 – the first of many foster homes she lived in.



Michelle was scared of being taken in by strangers. "My idea of foster care was watching Annie growing up, and so that's what I thought it would be," she says. "I worried that I was going to get beaten up, that no one would be there for me." She ran away several times.

That's when Children's Law Center got involved.

Children's Law Center was appointed by a family court judge to be Michelle's guardian ad litem, charged with looking out for her best interests. Michelle's attorney, Gabby Majewski, quickly became a tenacious advocate for her young client. She knew that Michelle needed more support to deal with the intense grief she had experienced.

"Michelle came into the child welfare system without help to deal with the loss of her mother and the rejection by her family and her first foster family," Gabby said. To help her overcome this trauma, Gabby advocated for intensive therapy for Michelle. She also pushed for a more stable home environment, arguing against stays in group homes where conflicts could arise with other teenagers.

Still, Michelle's teenage years were rocky. The trauma over losing her mother and her family, coupled with typical teenage rebellion made Michelle a bit of a fire keg. She would get into fights in foster homes and at school. She even ended up in juvenile detention several times.

"I used to get arrested a lot," Michelle says. When you meet her now, that is hard to believe.

Over time, with help from therapy, other intensive mental health services and more understanding foster placements, Michelle began to recover. Through this support and her own hard work, Michelle was able to better manage her emotions. She eventually settled in with a more supportive foster family.

"My foster mom now is absolutely wonderful," Michelle says.

Gabby and Children's Law Center were also with her every step of the way. When the child welfare agency wanted to stop Michelle's therapy multiple times, Gabby fought to keep her in therapy. And, whenever a conflict arose in one of the foster homes, Gabby pushed to make sure that Michelle could be in a new environment that was better prepared to help her recover from trauma.

Michelle raves about Gabby and how she has advocated and supported her.

"When I talk she always listens, when I need advice, she would always listen," Michelle says. "If I didn't have Gabby, I wouldn't be the person I was today. She always pushes me. When I say I can't do this, she says, yes you can!"

Today, with the support of her "absolutely wonderful" foster mom, Michelle says she is getting ready to be on her own. "My goal is independence," she says.

She's getting ready for living an independent life by graduating from high school, getting her driver's license and making plans for more education. She meets monthly with Gabby, her case worker and others to "talk about all the big and little steps it will take to get to independence," she says.

It's been a long journey into adulthood, but Michelle is confident she is on the right path. Why? Because when nobody else believed in her, she had a tenacious advocate in her lawyer Gabby. And now she believes in herself, too, and knows she can overcome anything.



Michelle (left) says: "If I didn't have Gabby (pictured right), I wouldn't be the person I was today...When I say I can't do this, she says, yes you can!"

We get children on the road to better health.

All parents want their children to be healthy. Sometimes, a child's poor health can't be solved by medicine alone but requires legal advocacy to secure the healthcare she needs to get better – or fix unsafe housing that is infested by rats, mold and cockroaches and making him sick. Whatever the cause, kids who have poor health end up in the emergency room again and again, and often do poorly in school.

Children's Law Center puts our lawyers side-by-side with pediatricians in health clinics across the District through medical-legal partnerships with Children's National Health System, Mary's Center and Unity Health Care. Together, we find and fix the root causes of children's poor health. And, we make sure struggling families can get the medical care their children need to get better. Often, this includes fighting for quality mental health care so DC's most vulnerable children can recover from trauma and neglect.

In 2014, our legal advocacy helped put more than 1,500 children and their families on the road to a healthier future.



Why Mariana Believes in Change

Mariana's* young daughter, now in first grade, used to wake her up all the time to tell her "Momma, I can't sleep, Momma, I can't sleep."

The problem? Bed bugs. They had come into Mariana's apartment from another unit, biting her daughter and her toddler son and causing them to lose sleep night after night.

And that wasn't the only problem with the family's apartment in Northwest DC near the border with Silver Spring. For many months they had also endured the mice that ran through their unit and infested the entire building. And their bathroom wall was constantly wet, caused by a leak from an upstairs neighbor's pipes.

Even worse, lately there was a pervasive smell of gas in the kitchen. There had always been problems with the stove, but now it seemed to be getting worse.

Mariana says she had just about given up. Her calls and visits to the building's property management office didn't prompt anyone to fix the problems. She had never met the owner; the staff managing the small building was constantly changing. She says she was increasingly worried about her kids who were covered by new bites every morning, but felt like she had run out of options.

Then one day in March, Mariana had a visit at home from Mary's Center, one of Children's Law's Center's medical partners. The health center had sent someone to talk about physical therapy for Mariana's son, who wasn't walking even though he was almost two years old.

When the health worker heard about the many problems that were putting the children's health in danger – and smelled gas in the kitchen – she called Children's Law Center.

That's when Mariana met Anne Cunningham, one of our senior attorneys who works closely with Mary's Center. "Anne was so nice!" Mariana says with a smile, "and so attentive to all of the problems."

Anne immediately called Washington Gas, which disconnected the leaky stove that same day. Her second call was to the building's management office.

Often, all it takes is a lawyer to get involved and a landlord will spring into action to fix dangerous housing conditions. Unfortunately for Mariana and her kids, this case was more complicated.

Once Anne got involved, the property manager did at long last inspect the unit and hired an exterminator to come and take care of the bed bugs. But the other promised fixes were slow – including the need to replace the non-working stove that had been disconnected by the gas company. As a result, Mariana could no longer cook and had to buy take-out food to feed her family, an expense she could barely afford on her meager income.

The property managers made repeated promises to fix the problems but never followed through. But Anne didn't give up. The owner apparently lived in a foreign country but she was able to track down the U.S. corporation that legally owned the building and filed a housing complaint in court.

Because the owner had dragged his feet for months, Anne also filed a complaint in small claims court asking that Mariana be reimbursed for new furniture that had to be thrown out when the bed bug infestation had spiraled out of control. In addition, she asked for money to compensate Mariana for the cost of buying restaurant food because of the lack of a working stove.



"Now I know things can change. I didn't used to think that. But I saw a big change with Anne's help," Mariana (pictured left) says about her lawyer Anne (right).

Anne and Mariana won both cases. At long last, the owner replaced the stove, fixed the plumbing leak and patched up the holes that the mice were using to get into Mariana's unit. He also paid Mariana over \$3,000 in damages, which Mariana is using to buy new furniture.

"Now I know things can change. I didn't used to think that. But I saw a big change with Anne's help," Mariana says. "It's much better now. My daughter feels so much better now and my children don't have any more bites," she says.

Mariana and her kids are at long last safe in their apartment and on the road to better health. They are now true believers that you should never give up no matter how difficult the problem seems – all thanks to their "nice lawyer Anne" from Children's Law Center.

We open educational doors for children.

A good education is a child's building block for future success. But today, too many of the District's schools are failing children.

Children's Law Center opens educational doors for children of all ages. First, we help children start school ready to learn by ensuring infants and toddlers get the early intervention they need if they have developmental delays. When children reach school age, we help families advocate for their children with disabilities so our DC public and public charter schools provide the special support required to help them learn. We also fight so children in foster care can stay with trusted adults in a familiar school no matter where they end up moving due to instability at home. Finally, when children are aging out of foster care, we ensure they get the transition support they need to successfully complete college or job training, putting them on a path to greater success.

In 2014, our legal advocacy opened educational doors for over 1,700 District children in these areas.



Teaching Derek to Read

"He was suspended so many times, I didn't know a first grader could be suspended so much." That's what Renee, now in her late 20s, says about her young son Derek's* experiences in school.

It's hard to believe that a school could suspend a six-year-old child, but that's exactly what was happening again and again to her very young son.

Renee had enrolled Derek in what she thought was a high-achieving charter school, wanting to put him on the best path for success. Because of his attention deficit disorder, Derek needed some extra help to learn – like the nearly 13,000 other children in DC who have physical, emotional or learning disabilities that impact their education.

But, Derek's school was failing to provide the support that he needed to learn despite promising to do so. "They didn't teach him anything – he couldn't spell one or two or red or blue," Renee said.

Worse, "he was labelled a 'bad kid' and became this constant source of negative attention," Renee said.

"They had just decided that they couldn't educate him... and kept moving him into different classrooms," she said. Just before first grade, Derek grew frustrated when he couldn't understand what was happening around him in summer school. He would throw a tantrum and the school would call someone to take him home. The tantrums became worse and worse.

That's when Renee found her "hero, Miss Sarah," otherwise known as Sarah Flohre, one of Children's Law Center's senior attorneys. A special education attorney since 2008, Sarah says that the admiration is mutual. "Renee is such an engaged and collaborative parent," she says, and "clearly wants what is best for her son."

The situation deteriorated until the school insisted that Derek could only stay if Renee or his grandmother sat with him each day in his first grade classroom to handle his tantrums. That was not a workable solution. It also violated federal special education law.

Sarah sprang into action, requesting a meeting with the school to understand what was happening in Derek's classroom. She also asked the school to put different behavioral tactics into place so he could stay in school every day without needing a family member there. But nothing seemed to work.

Renee and Sarah became convinced that his school just couldn't educate Derek. They asked that Derek be transferred to a different school that could help him overcome his worsening emotional outbursts and learning delays.

Unfortunately, the school bureaucracy seemed unmoved. A month went by until finally, Sarah sued the school district to hasten the pace of finding Derek a new school. "My hero said this is not going to be the way it is," Renee said. After a flurry of negotiation, the school system offered Derek a more appropriate school just one week before going to trial.

Derek at long last began attending his new school during the second-half of first grade. "He's at Payne [Elementary School] now, I love that school. He's reading stories by himself now, he is sounding out words, it's wonderful," Renee says.

What's different? Not only do Derek and Renee feel more welcomed in the new school but the teachers also are able to help him learn despite his ADHD. And, the school district is providing extra tutoring to help young Derek catch up for all the classroom time he lost at his previous school.

The intensive help is working, and Derek's now on his way to reading on par with his peers.

"He's a totally new boy," Renee says, "he's not the same at all."

That's what happens when you pair a dedicated mom like Renee with a tenacious advocate like Sarah: a young boy finally learns to read.



Renee (left) with her lawyer Sarah (right), now says about her son: "He's reading stories by himself now...he's a totally new boy, he's not the same at all."

Pro Bono

Though Children's Law Center is the largest non-profit legal provider in DC, many more children come to us than we can help. That's why we are honored to partner with hundreds of attorneys who help fill the gap. These volunteers come from more than 100 of the area's top law firms, government agencies, legal departments and solo practitioners. We also tap pro bono help for our own counsel and to help us research complex policy questions.

Our pro bono program provides world class mentorship, training sessions and extensive materials so attorneys – whether they are first-year associates or seasoned litigators – can be successful legal advocates for children.

With this support, our pro bono volunteers take on life-changing cases – from helping grandparents or foster families who step up to give children a loving home, to ensuring schools provide the special education a child needs to learn. Our pro bono partners may also take on complex custody guardian ad litem cases, where a child is caught in a bitter custody dispute, and housing matters where dangerous housing conditions are harming a child's health.

In 2014, pro bono attorneys worked over 34,000 volunteer hours on behalf of Children's Law Center – providing over \$13 million of the best legal advocacy to DC's most vulnerable children and families. As a result, thousands more children will grow up with a loving home, good health and a quality education.

Why Volunteer with Us?



When you ask attorney Gerald Richman why he volunteers as a pro bono attorney for Children's Law Center, he is quick to talk about the vulnerable children who need someone in their corner.

"A lot of these families are walking on a tightrope," he says. "But when you take a case and can reach a successful resolution, you can see immediate benefits [for a family]."

As a seasoned attorney at the Skadden law firm, Richman spends most of his days advising corporate clients about energy regulation. But his pro bono work lets him get involved "in another side of life," he says. Through his work with Children's Law Center, Richman helps many parents fight landlords who refuse to fix dangerous housing conditions that threaten their children's health.

"Nine times out of 10, if an attorney gets involved, the landlord suddenly has a strong incentive to fix the problem," he says. "It changes the equation for them." It also changes the equation for families whose children were once suffering from health problems like asthma that vastly improve once the housing is fixed.

By now, Richman is an old pro working with Children's Law Center but that wasn't always the case. "I feel more experienced now, but my first case, I didn't know anything about this stuff," he said. He talks about how the formal training and support from Children's Law Center helped prepare him.

He emphasizes how valuable the mentorship has been. "That's what's been most helpful," he says. In the end, Richman shares many reasons why pro bono work has been rewarding for him – and why more attorneys should volunteer. "If you're a junior person, these cases may be your best way to get 'first-chair' litigation experience," he says. "And it's a way to do something different, too, to try out different skills."

But most of all, he says "it's a good way to give back to the community, to help a family that doesn't have a lot of advantages in life." And, a good way to help get a child on a path to a better future.



2014 Pro Bono Partners

Because of pro bono volunteers from these firms, more of DC's most vulnerable children had someone in their corner to advocate for their needs. **We thank them.**

The Advisory Board Company	Dodd Legal LLC	Kirkland & Ellis LLP	Irene Price
Aetna	Doggette Law Firm, P.L.	Andrew Klingenstein	Proskauer Rose LLP
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Arent Fox LLP	Ernst & Young	Law Offices of Edward J. Elder	Rementer Law Group PLLC
Arce Stark Law LLC	Federal Government Pro Bono Program	Law Offices of Emilie Fairbanks PLLC	Resto Law Offices
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Axinn Veltrop & Harkrider LLP	Garvy Schubert Barer	Law Offices of Tina Sharma	Binta Robinson
Aziz Jewell & Mendoza	General Electric Company	Lawler Metzger Keeney & Logan LLC	Ropes & Gray LLP
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Bryan Cave LLP	Goodwin Procter LLP	Locke Lord LLP	Smith Pachter McWhorter PLC
Butzel Long	Hogan Lovells US LLP	Mayer Brown LLP	Patricia Spicer
Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft LLP	Althea Holford	McDermott Will & Emery LLP	Squire Patton Boggs
Vicky Cardenas	Holland & Knight LLP	McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP	Phyllis Stallone
Carlton Fields Jordan Burt, P.A.	Hollingsworth LLP	Milbank Tweed Hadley & McCloy LLP	Steptoe & Johnson LLP
Natasha Cenatus	Hughes Hubbard & Reed LLP	Miller & Chevalier Chartered	Stradley Ronon Stevens & Young LLP
Julianne Chappell	Hunton & Williams LLP	MK Family Law	Sutherland Asbill & Brennan LLP
Cisco Systems Inc.	Isler Dare Ray Radcliffe & Connolly P.C.	The Mokodean Law Firm	Jessica Tannenbaum
Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP	The Jacob Burns Community Legal Clinics at George Washington University	Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP	Robyn Thorpe
Clifford Chance US LLP	Jones Day	Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough LLP	Karen Todd
Columbus School of Law at Catholic University of America	K&L Gates LLP	Northrop Grumman Corporation	Nicole Tuchinda
Cooley LLP	Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP	Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP	Van Ness Feldman LLP
Covington & Burling LLP	Kaye Scholer LLP	Paul Hastings LLP	Venable LLP
Crowell & Moring LLP	Keller and Heckman LLP	Paul Kurth	Verizon
Davis Wright Tremaine LLP	Kellogg, Huber, Hansen, Todd, Evans & Figel, PLLC	Paul Weiss Rifkind Wharton & Garrison LLP	Weil Gotshal & Manges LLP
Dechert LLP	Khadiikar Law PLLC	Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP	White & Case LLP
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Dickstein Shapiro LLP			Williams & Connolly LLP
DLA Piper			WilmerHale
			Winston & Strawn LLP

Policy

We've learned a lot about our city agencies and laws while fighting for thousands of children and their families – what works and what doesn't in our schools, for traumatized children who need mental health care, and for struggling parents and their children.

These are the experiences that ground our policy advocacy. Children's Law Center takes what we've learned and offers city-wide solutions to the mayor, District agencies and the DC Council to better serve all children. Our policy advocacy improves laws, policies and practice, and secures media coverage to shine a bright spotlight on the District's successes and failures in meeting children's needs.

Our 2014 policy successes include:

- Spearheading historic education reform that will dramatically improve special education for students in our public and charter schools.
- Achieving three other important legislative wins, including new laws allowing foster youth to stay in a familiar school when they are adopted, requiring landlords to fix mold in rental units, and improving the ability of pediatricians to treat childhood mental illness.
- Advising DC's newly elected mayor, Muriel Bowser, on preventing violence and investing in youth through our appointment to lead her public safety transition team.
- Releasing our second annual Children's Mental Health Report Card, chronicling the District's improvements and failures in meeting children's mental health needs. The report resulted in wall-to-wall media coverage calling for speedier reforms and increased funding for important mental health programs.

Children's Law Center's policy successes build on thousands of hours of testimony, research, meetings and outreach with District leaders on behalf of children. Whether it is pressing agencies to better prepare older youth who age out of foster care, making sure children get special education services more quickly within DC schools, or ensuring pediatricians screen for children's mental health needs – our policy advocacy has delivered real results for children.

Making Special Education History

Every week, Children's Law Center gets calls from dozens of parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles who are struggling to understand why their school can't do more to help their child learn. The tide is now turning for these families – and the more than 13,000 children with physical, emotional or learning disabilities living in DC.

2014 brought historic special education reform to DC. In November, the DC Council unanimously passed three new laws that will ensure children can get special education services earlier, give parents the information and tools to be involved, and build capacity at DCPS and charter schools to meet these children's needs.



Children's Law Center helped shape the laws at the request of Councilmember David Catania, who introduced the bills. We spearheaded a large-scale, collaborative effort that reviewed lessons learned from our work fighting for better special education services; interviewed more than 40 education advocates from across DC; examined special education best practices from around the country; and drew on our close collaboration with all of the District's education agencies.

The resulting reforms are a historic win for DC's children – and will improve special education in our schools for years to come.



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We Live Our Values

Children’s Law Center is proud to attract the best advocates for DC’s kids – and we pride ourselves on being a best place to work as well. In 2014, Executive Director Judith Sandalow was called a “rare find” as a boss by Washingtonian Magazine for creating a family-friendly workplace. We also received the following honors:

- 2014 Best Workplace Award, The Washington Post
- 2014 Best Nonprofits to Work For, The NonProfit Times



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Ryan Kool
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Bridget Koza
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(July 2014-January 2015)*

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Anna Snyder
Social Worker

Kate Stanford
Staff Attorney

Holly R. Stevens
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Senior Supervising Attorney

Dennis Zittier
IT Associate

**Indicates staff who left during 2014.*



With help from hundreds of volunteer Santas from across the city, our annual Holiday Hope Drive brought our neediest clients toys, coats, bikes and other donations – making their Christmas a little brighter this year.



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Former National Institute of Health Director Elias Zerhouni joined us at Sidley Austin LLP in October for a conversation about why we should be “rationally optimistic” about how children will benefit from changes in the health sector. Pictured from left to right are board member Ted Segal, James Stansel of Sidley Austin and Dr. Zerhouni.



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In July, US Education Secretary Arne Duncan joined us for a candid talk about education reform nationwide and in the District, at an event hosted by McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP.

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Over 500 supporters and friends joined us for our annual Helping Children Soar Benefit at the Kennedy Center in September. Together, we raised a record \$1.1 million for DC's most vulnerable children. Pictured above is featured speaker Lena Borsellino, who we first met when she was 10, with her lawyer Jonathan Krell (*on the left*) and Judge Nan Shuker (*on the right*). We also honored Crowell & Moring LLP with the Children's Pro Bono Champion award.

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Children's Law Center opened educational doors for over 1,700+ children last year.

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Former Vermont Governor Howard Dean joined us at McKenna Long & Aldridge in July to share his views about promising healthcare reforms to help kids in DC and across the nation.

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Covers FY 2014 (Oct. 1, 2013-Sept. 30, 2014)

Revenue & Support

DC Court Contractual Service.....	\$5,553,444
Grants	852,769
Contributions	1,391,529
Donated Goods & Services	265,195
Other Income	18,967
Total Revenue & Support.....	\$8,081,904

Expenses

Total Legal Programs.....	\$7,084,295
General and Administrative	402,872
Fundraising	455,305
Total Expenses	\$7,942,472



89 cents of every dollar is spent on program services.

Children's Law Center fights so every child in DC can grow up with a loving family, good health and a quality education.

Judges, pediatricians and families turn to us to be the voice for children who are abused or neglected, who aren't learning in school, or who have health problems that can't be solved by medicine alone. With 100 staff and hundreds of pro bono lawyers, we reach 1 out of every 8 children in DC's poorest neighborhoods – more than 5,000 children and families each year. And, we multiply this impact by advocating for city-wide solutions that benefit all children.



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