

More than Mold

THE MATTHEWS FAMILY'S FIGHT FOR A HEALTHY HOME



Source: Storyblocks

Four-year-old Aiden wakes up night after night in a panic. He feels like there's a truck parked on his tiny chest. He wheezes, coughs, his throat hurts and he can't breathe. Aiden is having an asthma attack, and his landlord doesn't care.

When Children's Law Center (CLC) met them, Ms. Matthews and her two young children were living in an apartment reeking of mold and infested with rats and mice. The landlord refused to fix these issues. These living conditions exasperated Aiden's asthma.

Because there is a Children's Law Center lawyer embedded in Children's Health Center – Anacostia, Aiden's doctor referred Ms. Matthews on site. That's how attorney Diana Sisson began her advocacy for the family of three.

"Ms. Matthews was a relentless advocate for her family," Sisson said. "She sent the landlord photographs of the damaged apartment, made many phone calls pleading for repairs and even requested an inspection from DCRA, all in the hopes that her landlord would fix the root causes of Aiden's health issues."

The pleas went unanswered. Sisson and Healthy Together, CLC's medical-legal partnership program, were the solution.

Healthy Together removes non-medical barriers—ones like poor housing conditions and lack of appropriate special education measures—to children's health and well-being. Attorneys like Sisson are embedded in clinics and hospitals across DC, expanding health care for low-income families to include legal assistance.

Sisson represented Ms. Matthews as she sued for repairs—repairs that were critical to the family's health and safety.

"Before Diana came into the picture, the landlord and the agency didn't even pretend they cared," Ms. Matthews said. "I even shared a letter from the doctor saying Aiden couldn't live in these conditions. He missed probably half the school year because he was sick. Nothing happened until Children's Law Center became involved."

Through Ms. Matthews' hard work and Sisson's advocacy, the family won the case.

The court ordered the landlord to make the repairs. Now, the Matthews family lives in a mold-free apartment. They no longer fear coming across rats and mice daily. The holes in the wall are fixed, as are the carpets.

Most importantly, while Aiden still has the occasional flare up, he feels much better. The truck parked on his chest is gone and he can go to school again.

Children's Law Center works hard to protect our clients' confidentiality. Aiden's name and image have been changed. All other details are true.