

# CHILDREN'S CHAMPION

## NEWSLETTER OF THE CHILDREN'S LAW CENTER

September 2002

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## CLC Teams Up with Children's Hospital to Help Poor Children

Some babies have such extreme allergies that there is only one infant formula that nourishes them. Once the problem is diagnosed, the medical response is simple. The doctor writes a prescription for the formula. For poor infants insured through Medicaid, this medical response isn't enough. Medicaid refuses to pay for the infant formula because it doesn't pay for allergy treatment. Doctors aren't trained and don't have the resources to advocate for patients in these circumstances. These patients need a lawyer. Enter The Children's Law Center.

This Fall, The Children's Law Center is launching the Health Access Project. The goal of the project is to overcome barriers to health for poor children. Although we often speak of ensuring access to health *care* for children, health care is not synonymous with health for many poor children. For these children, non-medical barriers – schools that administer medication improperly, caregivers without the legal authority to consent to treatment and extreme poverty that leads to malnutrition – prevent medical treatment from being successful.

*[Continued on page 2.]*



## 2002 Distinguished Child Advocate Awards

The dedicated volunteer attorneys who have taken over 100 adoption cases from The Children's Law Center work hard all year, and CLC would like to say thank you.

On Wednesday, October 16, 2002 The Children's Law Center will hold its Distinguished Child Advocate Awards at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts' Roof Terrace Restaurant. James C. McKay, Senior Counsel at Covington and Burling, will receive the 2002 Distinguished Child Advocate award.

CLC plans to spend the evening singing the praises – literally – of pro bono attorneys who have participated in its Pro Bono Adoption Project. The Tone Rangers, winners of the Mid-Atlantic A Capella Competition, will give a short performance. According to their website, "the Rangers are a just barely domesticated group of free-spirited *a cappella* songsters. Although mostly policy wonks, attorneys, and computer geeks, they're much more at home on the open prairie than behind a credenza or keyboard."

*[Reply Form on page 2.]*

*The Children's Law Center helps at-risk children find safe, permanent homes and the education, health and social services they need to flourish by providing comprehensive legal services to children, their families and foster and kinship caregivers.*

## CLC Teams Up with Children's Hospital to Help Poor Children

[Continued from page 1.]

The Health Access Project, which is based on a model that is working successfully in Boston and Hartford, will involve a lawyer from The Children's Law Center (CLC) working full-time from an office located at Children's National Medical Center (CNMC). The lawyer will attend grand rounds and other CNMC meetings so that she can get to know the medical staff and their unique culture.

CLC and CNMC expect that the majority of assistance provided by the Health Access Project will be in the areas of special education, custody and public benefits.

The project is funded by grants from The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, the Stephen A. and Diana L. Goldberg Foundation and The Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation.

## Leading the Way

Matt Fraidin, CLC's Legal Director, was elected to the DC Bar Family Law Section Steering Committee for the 2002-2005 term. The Family Law Section offers educational programs, promotes continuing discussions between the bench and Bar, monitors local and federal legislation on children and families and supports public service activities.

## Walk for Children

Mark your calendar now to walk with The Children's Law Center in the 2002 Help the Homeless Walk-a-thon. Join us on **November 23, 2002** for the main walk on the National Mall or participate in community walks in Northern Virginia, Montgomery County and Prince Georges County (dates to be announced).

Schools, churches, temples and mosques can hold mini-walks of their own. The Children's Law Center would be happy to provide a speaker to talk with students or congregants about the needs of homeless children in our community.

To register or for more information about the walks, go to [www.helpthehomelessdc.org](http://www.helpthehomelessdc.org) or call Amy Miller at 202-467-4900 ext. 10.

### Please complete and return to CLC.

Sponsors receive recognition at the event and in the program.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Champion** (\$10,000) – 15 tickets

\_\_\_\_\_ **Mentor** (\$1,000) — Four tickets

\_\_\_\_\_ **Guardian** (\$5,000) — 10 tickets

\_\_\_\_\_ **Friend** (\$500) – two tickets

\_\_\_\_\_ **Advocate** (\$2,500) — Six tickets

\_\_\_\_\_ **Supporter** (\$250) – one ticket

For sponsorships, please mail this form and your check by **September 13**.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Individual Tickets** (\$100 each)

For tickets, please mail this form and your check by **October 9**.

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

For additional information, please contact Amy Miller at 202.467.4900 ext. 10.

## Grandma, Mom and Daddy – All in One

When Billy\* was three years old he couldn't speak and his five-year-old sister Ann never smiled. Their creative play involved pretending to roll marijuana joints. Today, Ann is 13 years old. She is running for class president and plans to go to college. Billy sings in his church choir and loves to dance.

*The Children's Law Center drafted the guardianship statute in 2000 to solve a common problem facing its clients. Grandparents and other relatives often expressed discomfort with adoption because the grandparent would become their grandchild's legal parent. The only other option was legal custody, an option that did not include the financial subsidy available through adoption.*

*Guardianship combines the financial support of adoption with the legal structure of custody. It is a form of legal custody only available to families in the neglect system. Through guardianship caregivers gain permanent custody of neglected children and are eligible for financial subsidy. Once guardianship is granted, the neglect case can be closed.*

Billy and Ann owe their happiness and success to their grandmother, Jean Porter. When social workers removed the children from their mother's home, Ms. Porter offered to raise them. Despite a chronic illness that prevents her from working, she attends every parent-teacher conference, volunteers at Ann's school and made sure that Billy had a tutor when he needed one.

Ms. Porter even went to a father-son event at Billy's school. The school first informed Ms. Porter that only Billy's father could attend the event. Billy's father, however, had never played a role in his life. When Ms. Porter saw that Billy was upset, she put on a men's suit and a fake mustache, piled her hair under a hat

and attended the event. Billy wasn't fazed when the other boys teased him – he proudly proclaimed, "You guys only have a grandmother. My grandmother is my grandma, my mom and my daddy."

Billy and Ann had nightmares that they would be returned to their mother or put in another foster home. Ms. Porter wanted to reassure her grandchildren that she would always be there for them, but she wasn't comfortable adopting them and becoming their legal mother. The lawyer appointed by

the court refused to help her unless she adopted. In front of the children, both the neglect judge and the social worker threatened to remove the children if she didn't adopt them. After that, the children checked Ms. Porter's room several times a night to make sure she had not abandoned them.

In desperation, Ms. Porter called The Children's Law Center. Staff attorney Vivek Sankaran carefully explained the legal and financial consequences of adoption and told Ms. Porter about another option – guardianship. Ms. Porter was relieved to have a lawyer whom she trusted and who would listen to her concerns. Once Ms. Porter understood her options, she confidently chose guardianship.

Vivek advocated for Ms. Porter through a difficult and contentious guardianship trial. The day the guardianship was granted, Ms. Porter ran to the metro and called the children. After getting home, Billy and Ann couldn't stop dancing and hugging Ms. Porter. After nine years, the children finally stopped worrying about their future.

*\* All client names have been changed.*



### ... And We Can Cook, Too!

Diane Weinroth, one of CLC's founding board members, won first place in the pie category in a city-

wide bake-off to benefit DC public school students. Diane prepared a strawberry pie for a bake sale held by Holland & Knight to benefit the firm's adopted school, Cleveland Elementary, unaware that by doing so she was participating in the Washington Lawyers' Committee Third Annual Cooking For Kids Bake Sale & Taste Off. The competition was judged by a panel of professional chefs.

## CLC Helps Foster Parents Advocate for their Children

Foster parents learned how to advocate for their children in court during training sessions taught by Judith Sandalow and LaShanda Taylor. More than 40 foster parents attended a peer advocacy training program sponsored by the Foster and Adoptive Parent Advocacy Center. Judith and LaShanda covered everything from how to find the right courtroom to the differences between adoption and guardianship to what to do when a guardian ad litem won't return your calls.

# The Children's Law Center

## Child Advocates In Training

The Children's Law Center relies on the hard work of college and law students to accomplish its mission. With the assistance of three to four interns every semester, staff attorneys can assist more children and accomplish more for each child.

But the intern program does more than help children today – the training and experience interns get at The Children's Law Center leads them to become child advocates once they finish school.

For the summer of 2002, CLC was lucky to have the assistance of a talented group of interns: Lauren Goodkin (George Washington University '02), Adam Hornstine (Harvard University '03), Sabrina Joshi (University of Michigan Law School '03), Sutton Kiplinger (Columbia University '04) and high school student Kiira Hall (Maret School '05).

## Workplace Giving Campaigns Begin

Holding a workplace giving campaign? The Children's Law Center can speak with your employees about our work and the importance of charitable giving. Contact Amy Miller at 202-467-4900 ext. 10 for more information.

The Children's Law Center (#8070) is an active member of the United Way and Combined Federal Campaigns. Please remember CLC and the children we serve when making your pledges.

## Friends and Foundations Support CLC

CLC is grateful for the continuing support of the **DC Bar Foundation** and the **Bar Association of DC**, which gave grants of \$22,000 and \$2,000, respectively in 2003.

The Health Access Project (first story on page 1) is being launched through the generosity of **The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation** (\$30,000), the **Stephen A. and Diana L. Goldberg Foundation** (\$25,000) and **The Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation** (\$10,000).

Special thanks to Sondra Javier at **Piper Rudnick** for designing this newsletter.



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## The Children's Law Center

1200 Nineteenth Street, NW, Suite 200

Washington, DC 20036

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

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