

Children's Law Center: Representing Children in Foster Care

CHILDREN'S LAW CENTER
OF MINNESOTA

(651) 644-4438

450 N Syndicate St, Suite 315
St. Paul, MN 55104

INFORM
NAVIGATE
EMPOWER



LEGAL ADVOCACY FOR
FOSTER CARE YOUTH

DONATE
CONTACT

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Children's Law Center

- **Mission**

- To promote the rights and interests of Minnesota's children, especially children of color and children with disabilities, in the judicial, child welfare, health care, and education systems

- **Facilitates legal representation of children in foster care**

- 300 volunteer attorneys representing between 300-400 children at any given time
- Appointed by the Court for children 10 years or older

- **Advocates for systemic reform benefiting foster children**

- 2010 legislation extended services and support to age 21

Foster Care in Minnesota

- **In 2007, 4,370 children were abused or neglected and 185 children per week went into foster care**

Minnesota Department of Human Services

- **In 2008, 13,755 children spent an average of 180 days in out-of-home care**

Wilder Research Center



- **Between 600 and 2,000 youth “age out” of foster care each year, most without a plan for housing, employment or health insurance**

Minnesota Youth Services Association

CLC Programs

- **Hennepin County**

- 1999: The Forgotten Child Project
- State Wards: Children whose parents' rights have been terminated (the state is now their “parent”)

- **Ramsey County**

- 1997: The Foster Child Advocacy Project
 - CHIPS: Children in Need of Protection and/or Services
- 2004: The Guardianship Project
 - State Wards

Why Do Children Need Lawyers?

- **Protection**
 - In most cases, foster children have been abused or neglected
 - Many experience homelessness and have parents with substance abuse issues
- **The Child Welfare System is Complicated**
 - Numerous players and confusing processes
 - Judges and County Attorneys do not meet with children
- **Children Need a Voice**
 - Attorneys advocate for what the child wants
 - Children are unaware of their rights and available services
- **Support for Transition to Independent Living**
 - Independent Living Plans and S.E.L.F.

Juvenile Court:

A Multi-Disciplinary Approach

- **Attorney: Advocates for Foster Care Youth**
 - Court reviews
 - Appropriate placement; permanency planning
 - Transition to adulthood
- **Social Worker**
 - Recommends services and placement
- **County Attorney**
 - Attorney for the Social Worker
- **Guardian ad Litem**
 - Advocate for Best Interest of Children
- **Parents and/or Foster Parents**
 - May or may not be parties or have legal rights

Dreams of Foster Children

Eric wants
to attend
Julliard

My lawyer fought to keep me in school so I could stay on my dance team after I moved to another foster home in a different district.

Sarah hopes
never to see
her abusive
mother again

I sought help because my mother was lying to the judge about abusing me and the judge kept sending me home. My lawyer helped get my mother's rights terminated.

Janna wants
to be treated
like a child
not in foster
care

After only one bad day in my foster home, a judge sent me to Juvenile Detention. My lawyer worked with the judge and social worker to convince them all children have bad days and everyone needs a second chance.

My Client's Stories

- **The Smiths**

- 4 children; oldest witnessed father murdering mother
- Children separated into different foster homes
- ➔ Providing long term support/services

- **Ms. Johnson**

- 10 year old girl; oldest of 4 siblings
- Mother tested positive for meth; mother's boyfriend is registered sex offender
- ➔ Client placed in safe foster care home until mother gets sober

- **Ms. Larson**

- 14 year old girl; abused by mother's boyfriend
- Mother homeless (on and off)
- ➔ Obtained services for mother; boyfriend removed from home

More Stories

- **Ms. Wilson**

- Left with grandmother by mother many years earlier
- Grandmother no longer able to care for the child and mother unwilling to take child back

 Child placed with relatives in out of state placement

- **Ms. Thomas**

- Child removed from home after being sexually abused by older brother
- Brother was placed in juvenile home; obtained treatment

 Child reunited with parents, after services provided

Justice Can Change a Child's Life

- **Before**

- I was in multiple homes and several different schools
- I never went to court hearings that were about my life
- I was not asked what I felt or what I wanted
- I was separated from my siblings

- **After**

- Someone listened to how I felt and what I wanted
- Someone explained what was happening in court and what options I have
- I got to go to court and tell the judge about what I wanted
- I got to see a therapist to talk about not having a family and why I was so angry
- I got to see my siblings

Conclusion

Questions and Answers

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“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead