

Children's Law Center of Minnesota

St. Paul, MN

1 Please describe your organization briefly, including mission statement, activities, size, etc.

CLC's opened for operation on October 2, 1995. Since its inception, CLC has collaborated with individuals and organizations in its efforts to improve the lives of children in Minnesota. Thanks to start-up funding from the major Minnesota foundations, CLC was able to lay the groundwork for excellent representation of children in the foster care system.

In its short history, CLC has garnered national attention. CLC and 3M received the 2007 Corporate Pro Bono Partnership Award and the 1998 Midwest Human Rights Hero Award was given to CLC by the Midwest Coalition on Human Rights. As well, a CLC volunteer was awarded the 2007 American Bar Association Pro Bono Publico Award at the ABA Annual Meeting for her work on behalf of CLC's clients and the executive director was the recipient of the ABA Young Lawyers Division Child Advocacy Law Award. U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno mentioned CLC specifically as an example of what lawyers can do for children. Since 1997, the Executive Director, has been a member of the American Bar Association Section of Litigation Children's Rights Litigation Committee Working Group that encourages attorneys nationwide to improve advocacy for children and provide volunteer representation to children. CLC is a founding member of the National Children's Law Network that is developing outcome measures for representation. CLC was honored to receive the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits Mission Advocacy Award for outstanding advocacy in 2003.

Mission

Children's Law Center of Minnesota's mission is to promote the rights and interests of children, especially children of color and children with disabilities, in the judicial, child welfare, health care and education systems.

Programs and activities

To fulfill its mission, CLC works to increase the effectiveness of child-serving systems with the goal of improving the lives of foster care youth. To meet its goals, CLC employs three strategies: (1) training volunteer lawyers for children; (2) representing abused and neglected children; and (3) advocating for systemic reform benefiting Minnesota's children. CLC currently has over 250 volunteer attorneys and about 450 active cases. In its twelve years of operation, CLC has represented well over 1,200 children, the majority of whom are children of color. Over 80 percent of our clients are between the ages of 12 and 19.

Education of Child Advocates

Volunteer lawyers are critical in providing a voice for children. CLC holds four training sessions a year for lawyers, judges, social workers and other child advocates. The training sessions are held at various Twin Cities law firms. In CLC's training program, youth formerly in foster care share their views and experience of the foster care system. CLC recruits volunteer lawyers from law firms and corporations within the Twin Cities as well as from solo practice. The purpose of the training is not only to educate child advocates about Minnesota laws that affect foster children, but also to provide guidance in giving quality and continuous representation to children. CLC tracks the cases and provides extensive consultation to its volunteer attorneys representing children. Each summer, our Princeton intern helps with the planning and execution of this training program for attorneys and also participates in the training.

Representation of children projects

Our representation projects are unique because we use volunteer attorney/social worker teams. As part of giving quality representation, the attorney and social worker meet with the child in advance of the court hearing in a setting that the child does not feel overwhelmed or intimidated. The same attorney represents the child for all proceedings that allows the child to develop a trusting relationship with the attorney.

Even when the court does not grant the child's preferences, having a voice in court makes the child more likely to abide by and understand the decision of the court. In a letter to her volunteer attorney, one foster child, Melanie, wrote, "**I am**

glad to have met you cause I would probably be doing drugs, running, and being a call girl if it wasn't for you helping me.... Make sure you help me get out of here, and I would make sure to do my part."

Foster Child Advocacy Project (FCAP) in Ramsey County is designed to give a voice to foster care children, ages 12 to 18, for the range of issues the children face in foster care. Such issues include development of case plans for the child, court reviews, and transition to adulthood. Our volunteers also advocate for the child's access to critical services, such as individual education plans and appropriate mental health care. Often, representation of foster children results in changes in their lives.

Tim, 9, John, 12, and Meg, 16, were removed from their home and placed in foster care when their mother called the police because she was afraid she would kill them. She was hospitalized for 72 hours and returned home. The county brought a petition declaring the children to be in need of protection. Several months after the emergency protective hearing, CLC was appointed to represent the children. The children remained in out of home placement with very limited contact with their mother who wanted them returned home. However, because she had threatened to poison them, the county was afraid to increase or even allow unsupervised visits. This was an Asian family. The children who were not placed in culturally appropriate homes longed to return home; they missed their own type of food and their mother's cooking. While the county maintained that the visits would not increase until she had therapy, they made no attempt to get therapy started. The CLC lawyer advocated for therapy to begin as soon as possible so that the reunification process could begin. He also advocated for the children to be allowed to spend more time with their mother and that she be allowed to prepare food for the children under supervision. After many months of vigorous advocacy, the children were allowed to have a trial home placement. With this successful reunification, the children have kept up with their studies and are happy to be home. The case was dismissed.

Nationally, 20,000 youth exit the foster care system each year expecting to be self-sufficient, yet many face serious problems. Consider the following case:

When CLC was appointed to represent 16 year old Tammy in 2004, she was in the child protection system for a second time. The first time, because of her biological family's abuse and neglect, her parents' rights were terminated. She was adopted at age 11 but when the adoption disrupted after one year, she was placed in a group home where she remained even though the adoptive mother's rights were terminated when she was 14. Her social worker requested a CLC attorney for Tammy because Tammy did not agree with the case plan which was for her to remain in the group home until she aged out at age 18. Tammy wanted to be in a family foster home. Her CLC attorney's request that she be placed in a foster home was granted. Over the course of the representation, each time that Tammy's placement disrupted, her attorney advocated placement in the least restrictive most family-like setting of a foster home. CLC understood that given the history of Tammy's early childhood an development, trust did not come easily to her and staying in one placement was difficult. Tammy stayed in touch with her attorney and especially when she needed services or things were not working out in the placement. Tammy was able to go on a school trip to Belize in her senior year. She graduated from high school, and currently is attending Community College.

Youth transitioning to adulthood need to be made aware of the options that they have so that they will have a better chance of success in life.

State Wards: The Forgotten Children Project in Hennepin County was implemented in 1999 with assistance from an Equal Justice Works Fellow whose fellowship ended August 31, 2001. Thanks to community foundation grants, CLC is able to continue the State Wards Project. CLC, with Hennepin County Juvenile Court, developed the State Wards Project to provide representation for state wards, "legal orphans," those children for whom parental rights have been terminated. The project is modeled after FCAP.

Many of these children will not be adopted and will spend their childhood in foster care as wards of the state. Often, many will end up homeless or moving from shelter to shelter. Volunteer attorneys facilitate adoptions as well as advocate for necessary services for these children, particularly transition to independent living services. The representation of children in the State Wards Project can also be life changing for the children:

David, 18, has been in foster care on and off since he was 13 years old because of chemical use by his mother and a confrontational relationship with his father. David had been in a school for the emotionally behavioral disturbed throughout his time in foster care. CLC advocated for David to be in a more appropriate school setting and foster care

placement. CLC also advocated for a plan that would help him to make a successful transition from foster care to living on his own since he had no family to return to. In Minnesota, juvenile court can maintain jurisdiction until the child's 19th birthday and the child can remain in foster care as long as the child is in school. At age 18, David, had another year of school left and wanted to remain in the foster care system because he realized he was not ready to be on his own. Instead, the county moved to discharge him from care even though they had not developed an independent living plan with him. In spite of county opposition, CLC advocated for him to remain under court jurisdiction until he could complete high school. The court agreed to extend jurisdiction until an independent living plan was developed and implemented.

System improvement projects and activities

Training and providing volunteer lawyers for youth is just one way that we are advocating for better situations for children in foster care. We also work to change the system so it better supports children. Among our activities are the following:

- CLC helped to write passed legislation requiring an independent living plan for every foster child 16 years and older. CLC also changed the statute to not require foster youth to reimburse the county if they chose to remain in care past their 18th birthday in order to transition from foster care. CLC had language added to legislation that required that siblings be placed together and not be separated unless the county can show what efforts had been made to keep them together.
- CLC serves on statewide committees and task forces, such as the Minnesota Supreme Court Task Force on Foster Care and Adoption, Minnesota Supreme Court Juvenile Protection Rules Committee, Children's Justice Initiative, and the CHIPS Workgroup.
- We write friend of the court briefs representing the child's point of view in cases affecting children at the invitation of the Minnesota Supreme Court as it grapples with decisions of great impact to Minnesota's children. We also submit amicus briefs in support of the application for writs of certiorari to the United States Supreme Court.
- From 1996 to 1998, CLC provided technical assistance and research to the Ramsey County Unified Court Pilot Project, a court improvement project combining juvenile, family and probate court into a unified family court. In a unified family court system, one judge hears all cases relating to one family. The goal is to have better decisions for the children. CLC participates on the Ramsey County Court Implementation Committee for the renamed Combined Jurisdiction court project.
- In January 1999, CLC held the first "Children and Immigration Law" conference in the nation to educate county agencies and county attorneys about the plight of children who are without legal status in the U.S.A.
- In September 2002, CLC held the first Symposium on the Legal Rights of Asian Pacific youth that was well attended by youth and service providers.
- In May 2003, CLC presented a statewide conference on children aging out of foster care.

Relationship with other organizations

CLC draws faculty for its training programs from judges and public and private attorneys and community organizations. CLC also works closely with and consults on cases with the Youth Law Project of Legal Aid Society of Minneapolis and with the Disability Law Center. Other community organizations, such as the State Public Defenders Office, Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, and Minnesota AIDS Project, seek regular consultation from CLC on issues affecting children.

Board members, staff, students and volunteers

CLC's Board is made up of experienced child advocates in the legal, judicial, educational and social service fields. CLC has six staff members: the executive director - who is also an attorney and social worker - an executive assistant, two attorneys, a social worker, and a development director. Students also seek out CLC to learn about children's legal issues. CLC provides internships to undergraduates and law school students from the four Minnesota law schools.

In 2006, CLC's volunteer lawyers gave over 8,700 pro bono hours which represent an in-kind donation of over \$1.75 million worth of legal representation. CLC also has good retention of its volunteers as many of CLC's volunteer attorneys have represented children for CLC since 1997. Community volunteers also give many hours to CLC.

2 Describe **in detail** the work or project an intern will do, **please be as specific as possible**.

CLC is interested in developing outcome measures for representation. CLC has represented over 1,200 children since launching its representation projects in 1997. Over the past five years, CLC focused on training social workers and volunteer attorneys about the independent living statute so that youth would be assured an independent living plan that addressed the education, employment, housing, health care needs of youth before they "aged out" of the system.

The Princeton intern will help CLC to gather and analyze data of how youth that CLC represented are faring since they transitioned out of foster care building on the work over the past four summers. The data consists of how many of the youth did in fact graduate from high school and go on for higher education, how many are in jobs that are paying a livable wage, etc. The intern will review the files of children served by Children's Law Center of Minnesota to learn what permanency option was arrived at. For youth who made the transition from foster care, CLC would like to know how many of the youth were in residential treatment facilities, delinquent facilities, or in foster homes at the time that court jurisdiction ended. Each intern has brought their unique perspective to analysis of the data – building on previous reports and making suggestions for areas to be examined further.

Where the information is not readily available in the file, the student will speak with county social workers and review the files of the children in county social worker's office.

The intern will also help to design a follow-up questionnaire that can be used with youth that CLC represented. The intern will acquire a working knowledge of the complexity of the cases by accompanying attorneys to court as feasible and to as many functions in the community that are appropriate.

3 Describe any particular skills, background, or qualities you are seeking in an intern

The intern should be able to organize materials, and have excellent research, analytical, and writing skills. The intern should be flexible, have good "people" skills and be comfortable taking the initiative. The intern should also be proficient in internet research and have good computer and word processing skills. Knowledge of Publisher is a plus

There are required dates for this internship. Internship must start on _____ and end on _____.

Start and end dates for the internship are flexible. We are flexible about the beginning and ending dates so long as ten weeks is achieved excluding the July 4 and Memorial Day holidays.

The expected working schedule for this internship:

Begin 8:00 a.m. End 5:00 p.m.

Lunch break: Length one hour specific time generally at noon