



2015

REPORT



Defending America's
Abused and Neglected Kids

For more than two decades, Children's Rights has been advocating on behalf of abused and neglected kids.

The impact is clear: Tens of thousands of children in the United States are now safer in foster care, have better education and health care, and are linked with permanent, loving families.

These results drive us forward to reach even more young people. In fact, we are expanding our advocacy, building partnerships with like-minded organizations and, as our work over the past year shows, we are putting hope into action.

Along with our co-counsel, we went to trial to fight on behalf of 12,000 children languishing in **Texas'** dangerous system of permanent foster care. Young people testified about long-term, pervasive problems — like overwhelming caseloads, too few foster homes and rampant abuse — that hurt them in the very system intended to protect them.

One young woman, Crystal, told the court that she was sexually abused “nonstop, pretty much every home I lived in.” She did not “really know” who her caseworkers were and felt she had no workers to confide in. Crystal said she was speaking out for children currently in care: “I might not get justice but ... some things can change for them and the other kids that are going to be in foster care.”

Thanks to the bravery of Crystal and others who testified, things will change. In December, a federal judge ruled Texas must make targeted improvements to its foster care system. The judge denounced the state for ignoring years of reports “outlining problems and recommending solutions ... Children have been shuttled throughout a system where rape, abuse, psychotropic medication, and instability are the norm.”



Photo Credit: Patrick Michels/Texas Observer

Crystal, above, testified about her experience in Texas foster care.

In 2015, Children's Rights also teamed with local advocates to file two new federal class actions. One — moving through the legal process — is on behalf of more than 18,000 kids in **Arizona**, where a severe shortage of foster homes and health care services and a failure to conduct timely abuse investigations are harming children. The other is on behalf of 3,400 kids in **South Carolina** foster care. The state has long struggled with a lack of foster homes, excessive caseloads and the mass institutionalizing of children. Now there is real promise for improvement: In June 2016 we reached a settlement, requiring essential changes to the way South Carolina cares for its kids.

As we focus on active cases, we have also continued to monitor progress in places where we have already won substantial reform.

One of these states has undergone a drastic turnaround. **Tennessee** was once beset with dangerous problems, but in April 2016 a federal judge ruled it had reached more than 140 mandated milestones to overhaul its foster care system. While some workers once had caseloads of 50 or more children, by 2015 at least 98 percent had caseloads of 20 or fewer kids. The state has improved medical and mental health screening for kids, eliminated the use of inappropriate shelters, and is reunifying more children with their relatives or placing them with loving adoptive families. The state must maintain these measures for at least a year to exit court oversight.

Over the past year, Children's Rights has also branched into important policy and advocacy projects. We are working with Lambda Legal and the Center for the Study of Social Policy to analyze the barriers that prevent transgender youth from being safe and supported in out-of-home care, and plan to publish a national policy report on the issue. And we worked with the New York City Board of Correction to create and implement measures on inmate safety, access to health care, education and participation in recreation for young people ages 16 to 21 incarcerated at Rikers Island.

As you can see, Children's Rights has spent the last year fighting for the young people who need us most. We are determined to remain strong in our resolve and impact additional lives. With your help, we can ensure even more kids have the safe, loving childhoods they deserve.



Sandy Santana
Executive Director



Megan Shattuck
Chair, Board of Directors

VICTORIES FOR KIDS

Thousands of children in Texas and South Carolina now have hope of a better future.

IN TEXAS:

For years Children's Rights and our co-counsel — Yetter Coleman LLP and Haynes and Boone, LLP — have fought to make Texas foster care a safer place and to give the 12,000 kids in permanent managing conservatorship (PMC) a chance at loving families.

The state allows caseworkers a maximum of 18 months to either reunify children with their birth parents or find them adoptive homes before they enter PMC, a status unique to the Lone Star State. Once there, the attention paid to their cases drastically diminishes, and far too many literally grow up in state care, shuffled between a variety of poorly-supervised foster homes and institutions.

After bringing the case of *M.D. v. Perry* to trial, in December 2015 a federal court judge ruled in favor of the children we represent. "Texas' foster care system is broken, and it has been that way for decades," wrote Senior U.S. District Judge Janis Graham Jack.

In her ruling, Judge Jack agreed that caseloads are too high, that placing up to 12 kids in a foster group home with no nighttime awake supervision is "a recipe for disaster," that the state fails to properly oversee licensed facilities where children live and that it lacks enough placement options to ensure children reside in appropriate settings.

"The Court did not need to read a volume of studies to figure out that placing children hundreds of miles from all that is familiar, separating siblings, housing children in facilities that are inappropriate for their needs, leaving children in facilities where they have been abused, and placing sexualized children in the same room as other children without proper oversight, all present substantial risk of serious harm," she wrote.

Now, the state must make specific changes to its foster care system. Judge Jack selected a pair of "Special Masters" to recommend a reform plan and oversee its implementation.

“There is a spotlight on Texas CPS now. The problems have come to light and they cannot be ignored.”

— Amy Zachmeyer,
former Texas
caseworker



IN SOUTH CAROLINA:

For too long, South Carolina's child welfare system has been troubled by a drastic shortage of foster homes, excessive caseloads and a failure to provide basic health care to kids. In an effort to compel change, Children's Rights took action. In January 2015, CR and our co-counsel — the South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center and Matthew T. Richardson, partner at the South Carolina law firm Wyche P.A. — filed *Michelle H. v. Haley* on behalf of the 3,400 children in foster care throughout the state.

Governor Nikki Haley and her administration recognized the need to strengthen state care, and came to the table wanting to find ways to improve the system. And by June 2016, we reached an agreement with state officials requiring important reforms to the way South Carolina treats its kids.

The settlement promises vital changes like ensuring reasonable caseloads, improving investigations of abuse allegations, and placing fewer young kids in institutions. It also will revamp health care so that all children get the medical, dental and mental health screenings and treatment they need.

Months before the settlement was reached, the parties agreed to court-ordered interim relief. It focused on ending practices such as: allowing children in state custody to stay overnight in hotels and child welfare offices; placing kids age 6 and under in group facilities; and recommending that foster kids remain in juvenile detention facilities even though they have completed their sentences or pleas, simply because there are no places to house them in state care.

Two national child welfare experts have been appointed as independent co-monitors, and will issue periodic, public reports on the state's progress. Children's Rights will continue to act as a watchdog, and work tirelessly until South Carolina's most vulnerable children are safe, secure and getting the care they deserve.

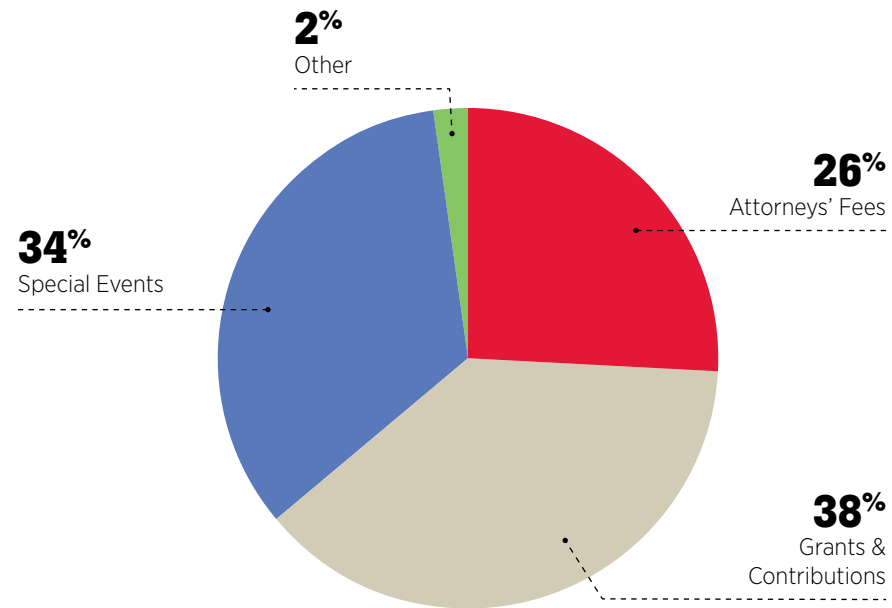


“This settlement is a game changer for children in South Carolina foster care. The state must now treat them as valuable, something it should have been doing all along.”

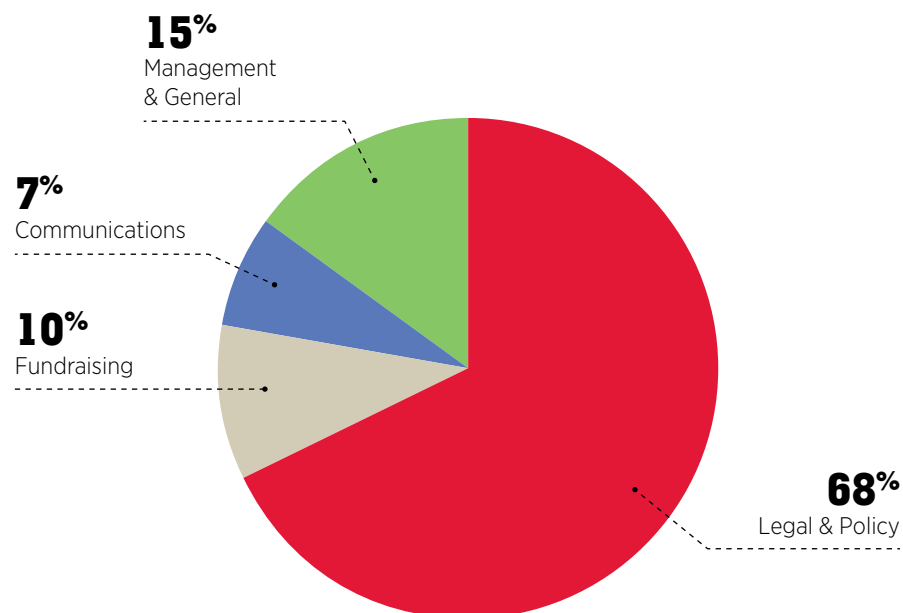
— Christy Irons, foster and adoptive parent
and Children's Rights Advisory Council
member

2015 FINANCES

INCOME



EXPENSES



2015 FINANCES

Statement of Activities Year ended December 31, 2015

PUBLIC SUPPORT AND REVENUE:	UNRESTRICTED	TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED	TOTAL
Attorneys' Fees	710,940		710,940
Contributions	828,945	215,000	1,043,945
Special Events	925,870		925,870
Investment & Other	6,951		6,951
In-Kind Donations	37,000		37,000
Net Assets Released from Restrictions	309,311	(309,311)	—
Total Public Support and Revenue	2,819,017	(94,311)	2,724,706
EXPENSES:			
Legal	2,976,342		2,976,342
Policy	162,070		162,070
Communications	308,667		308,667
Management and General	680,835		680,835
Fundraising	472,812		472,812
Total Expenses	4,600,726		4,600,726
Change in Net Assets	(1,781,709)	(94,311)	(1,876,020)
Net Assets - Beginning of Year	7,004,728	370,000	7,374,728
Net Assets - End of Year	5,223,019	275,689	5,498,708

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