In September, the media reported the alleged rape of a 13-year-old girl sleeping in a child welfare agency office in Johnson County, Kansas. The story of this child — staying overnight in an office because Kansas’ broken system lacked any housing for her — exemplifies a long-known danger. Kansas’ child welfare system is, and has been for at least a decade, systematically failing to protect children in foster care in the custody of the state’s Department for Children and Families (DCF).

In November, Children’s Rights took action. The class action lawsuit we filed tells the stories of what the ten child plaintiffs named in the suit have endured — but they speak for thousands more.

The plaintiffs range in age from 7 to 17, and have been in foster care for anywhere from several months to nine years. They have all been subjected to disrupted housing conditions so extreme that they are essentially rendered homeless while under the care of the state. They are pushed to the breaking point by being moved from place to place with little more than the clothes on their backs. The state pays more than $900,000 a month to private agencies to treat children this way — with no accountability.

And things are getting worse. According to a 2018 study, which Children’s Rights believes actually underreports the extent of the problem, housing instability for Kansas children is on the rise. Children are churned through new placements at a rate more than twice the national average, and the number of repeat placements has increased by 30 percent since 2016.

“Churning” in the Kansas foster care system dates back almost 20 years. This dangerous practice moves children from one foster care placement to the next — anywhere from ten to over 100 times while in DCF custody. Churning treats children...
ON THE FRONTLINES

It was a tough year for America’s children. The opioid crisis is driving up the number of children entering foster care, thousands of immigrant children remain in detention facilities, and government cuts to basic nutrition, health and anti-poverty programs put hundreds of thousands of kids at risk.

And our political system has for decades been indifferent. It doesn't matter who is in the White House, who has the majority in Congress or who occupies the state house. In red states, blue states and purple states the lack of meaningful and sustained investments to prevent harm to children goes back a long way. We spend less on children than almost any other developed nation. One-fifth of American children live in poverty, and they account for more than one-fifth of the homeless population. Each year about 2,000 American children die from child abuse or neglect and, on any given day, nearly half a million children are living in foster care.

It doesn't have to be this way. Liberal or conservative, Democrat or Republican, let’s make 2019 the year we take this personally. Let it be the year we each say: “I am committed to children. I will hold my government accountable.”

If we do, we can build a movement that will transform millions of young lives. Together we can build the just, compassionate society that our children so richly deserve.

Sandy Santana
Executive Director

Our Beating Heart

Recently, we decided to tell the story of Children’s Rights through the lens of the children we serve. After all, kids are the beating heart of what we do. The result? A boxed set of four child-size books. These books may be small, but they tell a mighty story. The story of how we — with your support — are protecting hundreds of thousands of children each year.

Download the books at childrensrights.org/books
Our groundbreaking lawsuit exposes the use of psychotropic drugs as “chemical straightjackets.”

In a huge victory for children, a judge required reforms to a woefully inadequate child welfare system.

Our landmark case led to the overhaul of the child welfare system — and is now a model for the nation.

Our new office brings hope to over 180,000 children in the South’s child welfare system.

Our report investigates systemic dangers and inadequate education for youth in residential foster care.

We helped stop the illegal separation of immigrant children from their families.

We worked to protect the rights of LGBTQ youth in states across the U.S.

Our voice was heard in national press and media outlets as we spoke out for abused and neglected children.

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AND IN CONNECTICUT, SOUTH CAROLINA, GEORGIA, MICHIGAN, MILWAUKEE, RHODE ISLAND AND ARIZONA

we are holding governments accountable for reforming their broken child welfare systems.
Out & About for Children’s Rights

2018 was an eventful year for Children’s Rights. A committed group of supporters gathered to defend the rights of children across the country. Check out some of our favorite moments here.

Celebrating and Shining a Light in NYC and Atlanta

Children’s Rights hosted not one, but two benefits in 2018. Our annual Benefit & Inspiration Awards in NYC honored Sixto Cancel, CEO of Think of Us; the technology platform Box.org; and Lee Gelernt, the Deputy Director of ACLU’s Immigrants’ Rights Project. Our inaugural Atlanta benefit honored Kate Atwood, founder of Kate’s Club; Trenny Stovall, Director of DeKalb County Child Advocacy Center; and George McKerrow, co-founder and CEO of Ted’s Montana Grill. Thank you to our amazing event co-chairs and many supporters who made both benefits a success!
Lexi Gruber, member of our Young Professional Leadership Council, shared her story on Instagram in order to support the inaugural Children’s Rights Fellowship, which will provide five former foster youth with the opportunity to intern at Children’s Rights in Summer 2019. Want to support the fellowship? Become a monthly donor at childrensrights.org/member!

Lexiepg • Following

lexiepg I am living a life that I never could have dreamed of when I was in foster care. And that’s all because of an internship I had. When I was 19 years old, I had the life changing opportunity to participate in a competitive internship in Congress for former foster youth. My internship led to a job on Capitol Hill, an invitation to testify before Congress, and allowed me to make an impact on a national level. I want to make sure other former foster kids have similar opportunities.

Children's Champion Ride:
In partnership with longtime Children’s Rights Board member Dan Galpern, we held our first-ever #RideForKids, cycling to raise money for children in state foster care, education, immigration, and juvenile justice systems.

Shopping for a Cause: Kelli Shaughnessy, founder of SSY Designs, hosted a shopping party with 100% of proceeds going to support Children’s Rights. Learn more at instagram.com/ssy_designs.

Rocco, one of our youngest supporters, hosted a lemonade stand and raised $1000 for Children’s Rights.


We are pleased to introduce our new Children’s Rights Board member, Anne Robinson. Anne is Managing Director, General Counsel, and Corporate Secretary of Vanguard, and brings her passion for protecting children across the country. Welcome!
A 2018 court decision is good news for the 12,000 children in permanent foster care in Texas. In October, the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld major parts of an earlier ruling by a district court judge finding that the children in the care of the state's broken, unconstitutional system “almost uniformly leave state custody more damaged than when they entered.” Children’s Rights and Texas co-counsel, Yetter Coleman LLP and Haynes and Boone LLP, brought the suit in 2015.

The appeals court agreed that the state was deliberately indifferent to the systemic flaws threatening the safety of children, and that while in the child welfare system many children experience concrete harm. “This ruling gives hope that the state of Texas will finally invest the resources it needs to properly serve the most vulnerable children in its care,” said co-counsel Paul Yetter.

With the court-ordered reforms, the state will increase the number of caseworkers overall while reducing their exorbitantly high caseloads. The state will also be required to improve its woefully deficient investigations practices and take the actions necessary to keep kids safe.
A new report by Children’s Rights and the Education Law Center raises grave concerns about the safety and educational opportunities of youth in residential foster care in Pennsylvania. The number of children living in Pennsylvania group facilities exceeds the national average. Too often, because of a woeful lack of oversight, they suffer verbal, physical, and sexual abuse and mistreatment from staff and other children. Yet the state continues to ignore repeated reports of violence and mistreatment — and uses taxpayer dollars to put children in harm’s way. But the harm doesn’t stop there. Children’s educations are also being largely ignored: most of them attend “on-grounds” schools located at or near the residential facilities, instead of at a nearby public school. These schools often lack even the basics of a decent education, with children of various ages mixed in one classroom and a curriculum that relies heavily on worksheets. Sometimes, students cannot even receive high school credit for their work because the coursework at these schools is not recognized.

The report was released in December, and early response from the media and advocates has been one of outrage. Pennsylvania’s children deserve what every child deserves: safety and security at home, and educational opportunities at school. Pennsylvania owes them no less.
To make a gift to Children’s Rights, visit www.childrensrights.org and click “Donate Now.”