

11 12 REPORT



Defending America's
Abused and Neglected Kids

We are often asked,

“How do you find the energy to fight for foster kids year after year? It’s such difficult work.”

Yes, our jobs can be intense. Even grueling. So where do we find the will to press on?

In the children whose rights we defend.



Take Jarod Stites, one of nine children represented in our class action lawsuit to reform Oklahoma’s child welfare system. For years the agency operated without standards or accountability — repeatedly garnering one of the worst rates of abuse in care in the nation.

Jarod Stites, above, is also pictured on the cover with his brothers Jaquan, Jeremiah and Moses.

Jarod was one of many who suffered. He was shunted between at least 20 placements in eight years. He hardly knew his caseworkers. One foster mother beat him with switches. He changed schools constantly, falling behind in his education. And his brothers' early lives were just as tragic. Jaquan, Moses, Jeremiah and Jarod often were separated from one another as they bounced between unsafe foster placements, institutions and the abusive home of their biological mother.

Children's Rights never gave up on the Stites brothers or any of the 8,000 other children in Oklahoma's foster care system. Not the 5-month-old infant who suffered a skull fracture when he was dropped by a worker holding two babies in an overcrowded shelter. Not the 5-year-old boy, who after being cycled through nine placements in less than a year, tried to jump out of a moving car so he could "go to God."

We pressed on with our work, because we know that the lives of children can be transformed. And in early 2012, after four years of intense advocacy, we won a court-ordered reform that ensures Oklahoma officials will revamp their dangerous foster care system. Now thousands of kids in Oklahoma will finally be given the protection they need and deserve.

The Stites brothers are flourishing. They were adopted into a loving, stable home, and their family is giving the boys the foundation they need to pursue their own dreams. According to their mother Deborah: Jarod has won awards in his ROTC program; Jaquan made the football team; Moses is earning A's and B's in school; and Jeremiah plays trumpet in the band.

In the almost 20 years we've spent using comprehensive legal campaigns and policy work to reform over a dozen foster care systems throughout the U.S., we've witnessed the foundations of children's lives being rebuilt — and their resiliency shining through. Remarkable young people like Jarod, Jaquan, Moses, and Jeremiah propel us forward. They drive us to shine light on the darkest corners of American foster care, to expose harm inflicted on children, and compel the reforms that help protect them.

We know unsafe systems can be fixed. We've made it happen. While we've made tremendous headway, we must press on for the 650,000 children spending time in U.S. foster care every year. With your support we can reach even more kids — repair even more foster care systems — and ensure even more children are given the foundations they need to thrive.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marcia Robinson Lowry".

Marcia Robinson Lowry
Executive Director and Founder



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan C. Myers".

Alan C. Myers
Chair, Board of Directors

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS REFORM CAMPAIGNS

Failing child welfare systems can be transformed to protect the children whose lives depend on them — we've proved this through tough legal action that compels system-wide reform.



With the help of dedicated child advocates and experts in the field, Children's Rights investigates dangerous systems and builds airtight legal cases that expose consistent harm inflicted on children. We develop long-term solutions and secure court orders that mandate top-to-bottom change. We ensure that these orders are fully implemented so children in foster care are safe, even if it takes years. Nothing less is acceptable.

It is this attention to detail, combined with the passion and commitment of our enormously talented staff, which has led to Children's Rights' impressive track record: we have won 15 out of 17 cases, producing real, measurable improvements in the lives of abused and neglected children.

Most recently, our reforms have brought hope to **Oklahoma**, where we won an extraordinary settlement in our long-fought effort to improve foster care. For four years we advocated that the system be revamped for the babies who stayed too long in shelters; for the kids moved too many times between foster care placements; and for the workers spread thin by overwhelming caseloads. Our landmark settlement agreement yielded a roadmap for independent child welfare experts to ensure Oklahoma reduces child abuse and neglect in care, boosts the number of available foster homes, lowers caseloads and ultimately increases the number of children who find permanent families.

Though this massive effort in Oklahoma involved most of our legal staff and strained our resources, we weren't content to focus on one case. In 2010 and 2011 Children's Rights filed class-action suits in three new states, and for good reason. Too many of Texas' 30,000-plus foster children languish as permanent wards of the state with little hope of having a permanent home. Massachusetts' foster care system consistently is one of the 10 worst in the nation for child abuse and neglect in care. And Rhode Island's foster children are too often placed in orphanage-like institutions rather than homes with families. These are just a few of the troubling issues in these states that Children's Rights is fighting to address.

Children's Rights is also monitoring progress where we've already won substantial reform. In 2011-2012:

MILWAUKEE cut the occurrence of abuse and neglect in foster care to an all-time low, and reduced caseloads to 15.7 children per worker, another record low.

WASHINGTON, DC ensured new staff are prepared to work with children and families by training 94 percent of social workers within three months of being hired.

CONNECTICUT reduced by more than half the number of kids under 13 years old living in institutions since the beginning of 2011, and at the same time cut the number of children sent to out-of-state institutions by 64 percent, from 364 to 131.

MICHIGAN introduced a university-based training program to prepare new caseworkers for their role in assuring child safety, and replaced 83 county-based child abuse hotlines with one centralized intake system to ensure abuse and neglect reports are addressed timely and consistently.

NEW JERSEY recruited and licensed nearly 1,500 foster families in 2011, and began to implement its quality review system – giving management an in-depth look at individual cases and allowing staff to review and improve upon their work with families.

MISSISSIPPI agreed to a revised settlement plan requiring the child welfare agency to take concrete steps to protect children from maltreatment in foster care, improve abuse investigations, and place kids in permanent homes quickly.

“My buddy Rocco was adopted by loving parents. Thousands of foster kids across the country aren't so lucky. Children's Rights knows how to harness the power of the courts to change entire systems for the better, and I'm proud to stand with them.”

— Kasseem 'Swizz Beatz' Dean,
Grammy Award winning producer
and artist, philanthropist,
visual artist and businessman





Our policy staff complements our legal efforts with national advocacy, conducting studies and issuing major reports to show how better public policy can bring improvements to the lives of children in foster care.

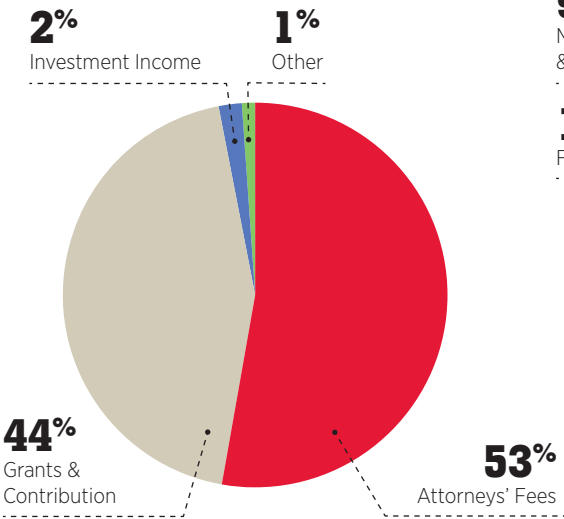
Recent policy projects include:

What Works in Child Welfare Reform: Reducing Reliance on Congregate Care in Tennessee – a comprehensive 2011 study focused on Tennessee’s effort to increase the number of children in foster care living with families rather than in institutions — such as shelters, group homes, and residential treatment centers. The report shows that the state’s child welfare system has greatly improved its ability to reserve institutional care only for youth with severe mental and behavioral health needs.

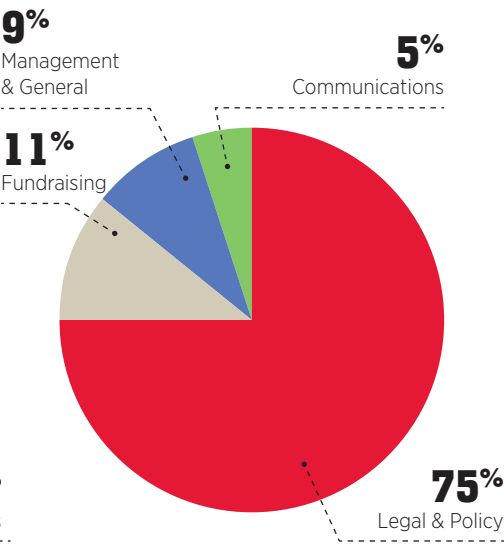
Ensuring High-Quality Kinship Care for Children in Wisconsin – a report on Wisconsin’s recent effort to license and train relatives to care for children in state custody, following a legislative change in 2009 requiring relatives caring for foster youth to apply for a foster home license. The report offers specific recommendations to help ensure that foster youth living with relatives are just as safe as those living with unrelated foster parents. Since it was issued, Wisconsin has committed to evaluate its Level of Care system, which includes the statewide conversion of unlicensed kinship caregivers to licensed kinship foster parents addressed in the report.

2011 FINANCES

INCOME



EXPENSES



Statement of Activities Year ended December 31, 2011

PUBLIC SUPPORT AND REVENUE:	UNRESTRICTED	TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED	TOTAL
Attorneys' Fees	2,374,396		2,374,396
Contributions	1,240,382	278,693	1,519,075
Special Events	435,032		435,032
Investment Income	87,793		87,793
In-Kind Donations	57,000		57,000
Program Income	12,099		12,099
Net Assets Released from Restrictions	617,353	(617,353)	—
Total Public Support and Revenue:	4,824,055	(338,660)	4,485,395
EXPENSES:			
Legal	5,037,591		5,037,591
Policy	659,378		659,378
Communications	397,891		397,891
Management and General	696,978		696,978
Fundraising	847,799		847,799
Total Expenses	7,639,637		7,639,637
Change in Net Assets	(2,815,583)	(338,660)	(3,154,242)
Net Assets – Beginning of Year	13,209,984	885,857	14,095,841
Net Assets – End of Year	10,394,402	547,197	10,941,599

Much of Children's Rights' funding is derived from attorneys' fees, which are not guaranteed and may take years to recover. Despite our impressive track record, it is critical that we diversify our funding through grants and contributions to ensure that life-altering work never comes to a halt.

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 ensure the accuracy of this report.*

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