

# "What's Up?"

## National Children's Law Network

*Child Advocates* is involved in an exciting new project, the National Children's Law Network. Eight non-profit children's law centers that use pro bono attorneys are working together in program development, volunteer training and support, outcomes measurement and evaluation, consultation in practice decisions, and strategic planning.

The initiative features four component activities: Service Delivery, Outcomes Development, Practice Review and a Common Policy Initiative. To build our capacity to interact and collaborate, the Network will feature periodic meetings, E-mail/Internet linkage and a web presence. Ten to twenty additional organizations will participate periodically in Practice Review and Policy Advocacy activities.

***The goals of the National Children's Law Network include:***

- promoting the effectiveness and growth of pro bono children's law programs;
- identifying concrete outcomes and measures by which child advocacy organizations can identify goals and evaluate effectiveness (i.e., how to define success in a child abuse case);
- improving the quality of counsel and representation provided to children in complex cases;
- delivering a coordinated message for effective change on vital national issues of policy and practice for children, pursuing advocacy on common themes in a multiplicity of jurisdictions and media markets.

Historically, attempts to coordinate efforts with children's law centers across the nation have been burdened by distance and diversity of local practice. Although such law centers represent the strengths of locally-grounded, concrete work with children, we fail to make a broad impact or attract national charitable foundations for sustained support of local, direct-service children's law efforts. Through our collaboration, the Network will build on common strengths to expand the capacity, quality and sustainability of each organization and extend our impact on vital issues of children's policy.

The Network will focus its activities primarily on a population of children and youth who are involved

in the delinquency or dependency system and who receive or need specialized services from one or more public service-delivery systems. Each participating organization will identify a cohort of client children, whose cases will be studied as part of the Network's activities. Together the groups are developing a database to track activities, strategies and outcomes, to produce a basis for programmatic accountability. The Network is coordinated by *Child Advocates* and the Children and Family Justice Center of Northwestern University School of Law.

The fruits of the initiative should help the eight organizations and others who represent children. The Network will develop consistent program objectives and performance standards for child advocacy service, and identification and strategies for elimination of recurrent barriers. Sharing training materials and programs, the Network will create a formal linkage for consultations on questions of practice, ethics and program management. The several organizations will explore and develop our capacities to effect changes in policy and practice, demonstrating the techniques and strategies that work across jurisdictions. Ultimately our locally-based child advocacy organizations may gain access to new and sustained funding from national sources including major foundation and government programs. By focusing on pro bono organizations, and by articulating to others the lessons we learn from our work, the Network will further engage members of the legal community in meeting the unmet legal needs of children and youth.

Child advocacy organizations represent youth from low income families who are involved in the justice system due in part to their unmet needs for permanency, family resilience, safety, education, health services, or emotional supports, and whose complex problems and needs often confound traditional providers of legal and social services. What child clients are offered by public systems is largely fragmented and often inadequate to meet the youth's complex needs. Children's law organizations need to define success in complex cases so as to guide service planning, training, program development, resource allocation, and policy makers. *Child Advocates* has taken the first step toward meeting these goals for our nation's children.

### Kids Helping Kids

A special thanks to kids who have made donations to our kids. Carter Barnhart; Matthew Bernstein; Alex Cohen; Cayla Huppert; and the Lower Merion Little League Team, The Trappers have all generously made gifts from their own pockets!

