

# NOTES FROM THE FIELD

THE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS NEWSLETTER

FALL  
2014



Defending America's  
Abused and Neglected Kids

## INSIDE:



Grammy Award-winning artist Shaffer 'Ne-Yo' Smith honored at Ninth Annual Children's Rights Benefit



CR brings fight to reform Massachusetts foster care to 1st Circuit Court of Appeals

## IN FOCUS:

### Foster Youth Fall Prey to Traffickers



Photo Credit: Patrick Michels/Texas Observer

Crystal said that, after growing up in foster care, she was coerced into the sex trade.

At 18, Crystal had already experienced a lifetime of pain.

She was molested by her mother's boyfriend and spent the rest of her childhood being moved between foster homes, enduring more sexual abuse, beatings, a failed adoption and a stint in a residential treatment center. She had just escaped a violent boyfriend when someone recommended a woman who would take her in.

That woman, Crystal said, was the first person to sell her for sex. She gave Crystal drugs and used Crystal's body to pay the rent, she said.

"A guy offered her \$1,500 and she said, 'Crystal, we are going to be out on the streets. Can you please do this? Can you please do this?' And I did it," Crystal recalled in an interview with Children's Rights. "After that, she expected it. She told me if I didn't contribute to her in that way, I was out. I had no place else to live."

A few months after moving into the house, Crystal said she went to a party with a man who slipped her a pill, then "had sex with me and told me that I was his." He made her work in a strip club, sold her to other men, and kept the money for himself, she said.

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# ON THE FRONTLINES

## FROM CR'S INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Children's Rights is on a mission.

We are determined to build upon our success and protect even more abused and neglected kids when child welfare systems fail to do so. Meaningful reform takes time — but with 640,000 children in foster care every year, we are compelled to ensure that vital, life-altering changes occur.

And because change doesn't happen overnight, our work must be fueled daily by a passion to improve the lives of these children. It's not hard for me, especially when I think about the lives of my 9, 7, and 3 year olds. They can count on staying in the same home, attending the same schools, knowing where their next meal will come from and, most importantly, getting the love they deserve. For far too many children in foster care, these things are not a given.

They weren't for Crystal, the keynote speaker at our 2014 benefit, who has graciously allowed us to share her story in this edition's cover article, *Foster Youth Fall Prey to Traffickers*. There is no way to remain complacent when reading about the lifelong sexual abuse — both before and during her time in foster care — that led to her being trafficked.

And she's far from the only one — up to 67 percent of children who are missing and likely trafficked have spent time in foster care. "We must reform foster care to deter sex trafficking," human rights activist Molly Gochman asserted after receiving the Children's Rights Champion Award at our annual benefit last month.

Then there is Edgar, who went into foster care when his father was deported. His drive to get an education kept him afloat, and he discovered The Compound Foundation, where he participated in its young CEOs competition and won for a business plan to take disadvantaged youth on college tours. Edgar presented R&B superstar and Compound founder Shaffer 'Ne-Yo' Smith with a Children's Rights Champion Award. The good news: Edgar is now at Syracuse University on a full scholarship. But thousands upon thousands of others struggle to survive.

So what are we doing about it? We're working with people like Jared Bobrow of Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP, our third Children's Rights Champion, who spoke of the need for widespread reform in Rhode Island. And you can read updates on our legal advocacy in Massachusetts, Texas and other states in *Reform Watch* and *In the Courtroom*.

Children's Rights knows thousands of kids are depending on us to ensure they are safe and have the care they need. We are resolved to remain the vigilant, smart, passionate advocates they deserve. In years to come, we will continue to confront pressing child welfare issues and target areas where our law and policy skills, and our ability to push concerns to the forefront, can best leverage widespread change.

So I am proud to bring you this edition of *Notes From the Field*. There is nothing more important than protecting the most vulnerable among us and giving them the chance to lead the happy and productive lives they deserve. With your support, we will remain the leading national voice of foster care reform. As you consider your philanthropic priorities this holiday season, I hope you will invest in our life-saving work.

Sandy Santana  
Interim Executive Director

# CR INSIDER

*Children's Rights Board member James Stanton — president of the World Wide Group — explains his passion for defending abused and neglected children.*

Children's issues have always been important to James Stanton. So when his close friend and colleague, civil rights attorney Richard Emery, asked him to become a part of CR, he stepped in and joined the board in 2010.

"The more I found out about CR, the more I realized it was an important organization whose goal is trying to fix monumental problems in a huge system. It's trying to fix a system which is broken in most states in the United States. The statistics you hear are heart-wrenching. On any given day, there are nearly 400,000 kids in the system and an unacceptable number are being abused or neglected. I don't think people are aware of that at all."

The individual stories of children — those whom CR defends and those who bravely

recount their experiences each year at CR's annual benefit — stick with Stanton.

"They're very hard to hear, a lot of these young people have made it through an incredible amount of suffering. At the annual benefit, their stories bring many of the guests to tears, myself included."

Stanton says the range of issues that desperately need to be addressed within child welfare are extensive. "There are too few caseworkers overseeing too many cases. The splitting up of siblings, the overuse of psychotropic drugs, the physical and sexual abuse — it goes on and on."

As a father of twin boys, Stanton is motivated personally, he says, to continue to work on behalf of vulnerable children.



"I think that any parent would feel the same way. When you look at your own kids, you know their lives turned out differently ... If you're looking to address the needs of children, the earlier the better. Which is one of the reasons I think CR is such an important organization."

## Kids Pour Lemonade to Raise Awareness



Olivia Galpern, Gavin Galluzzo, Mia Galpern and Isabel Santana helped out at the CR lemonade stand.

The children of CR board members and staff pitched in to help raise awareness about the need to reform failing child welfare systems in the United States during CR's first-ever lemonade stand event, held in October.

"Kids for kids! Support kids in foster care!" Mia Galpern, daughter of CR board member Daniel Galpern, chanted as other children handed out information on CR and poured lemonade for people at the Tribeca, New York City location of Flywheel Sports. The leading national chain of boutique indoor cycling studios was co-founded by CR board member Jay Galluzzo.

The event was hosted by Galluzzo, his wife Jenny and their children Gavin and Reid, as well as Daniel Galpern, his wife Cori and their children Mia and Olivia.

"It was great to see our children connect with such an important cause, and spend the afternoon raising awareness for Children's Rights and foster kids across the country," Jay Galluzzo said.

The lemonade was generously donated by Juice Press.



# Benefit Brings Compelling Stories to Light

Approximately 300 guests gathered for the Ninth Annual Children's Rights Benefit on October 29 to honor several extraordinary individuals — human rights activist Molly Gochman, Grammy-Award winner and Compound Foundation founder Shaffer 'Ne-Yo' Smith and attorney Jared Bobrow of Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP — whose efforts have made a difference for children in foster care.

"We see these kids as our children," Sandy Santana, interim executive director of Children's Rights, told the crowd. "Think of the rejection, abandonment and fear a 7-year-old child feels when he hears a knock on the door and is taken away from his parents ... imagine that that 7-year-old never finds a forever family, turns 18 and has to face the world homeless and alone."

Thanks to all who attended, the event raised more than \$700,000 to help CR continue to expose and repair dangerous child welfare systems in states where thousands of lives are at stake. Other notable guests included producer Kasseem 'Swizz Beatz' Dean, CNN's Michaela Pereira, former CEO of Ford Models Katie Ford and Edgar Carranza, a presenter who was once in foster care.

Keynote speaker Crystal Bentley gave a gripping account of her experience in foster care and eventual road to success.

"I lived in six abusive homes and temporary shelters. In some, I was beaten or verbally abused by foster parents. In others, I was molested by their children," she bravely began. Bentley described an arduous path to rebuilding her life, which inspired a standing ovation. "My past is the best fuel to drive me forward, and I look at it from a different perspective: I am no longer a victim. I am victorious."

**1.** Michaela Pereira **2.** Philip Sprayregen, Laurie Sprayregen, James Stanton and Kelli Shaughnessy **3.** Joseph Belluck and Anne Strickland Squadron **4.** Nandy Mason and Mercedes Funderburk **5.** Meaghan Charles **6.** Ira Lustbader, Sara Bartosz and Lawrence Fox







7. Molly Gochman, Michael Armilio, Mary Ellen Carroll, Ron Kern, Evan Van Hook, Kyle Wright and Liutauras Psibilskis 8. Katie Ford, Latham Thomas, Molly Gochman and Sarah Berner 9. Kasseem 'Swizz Beatz' Dean and Shaffer 'Ne-Yo' Smith 10. Alan Myers, Daniel Galpern, Alice Rosenwald, Michael Borofsky and Jay Galluzzo 11. Crystal Bentley 12. Hugh Hildesley 13. Anne Robinson, Megan Shattuck and Sandy Santana 14. Jared Bobrow and Miriam Buhl 15. Attendees show support at reverse auction 16. Crystal Bentley and Edgar Carranza  
Credit for 1 and 16: Billy Farrell Agency.

# IN FOCUS: Foster Youth Fall Prey to Traffickers

(continued from page 1)

"There were times when I knew if I wasn't going to do it, I would get beaten, if I wasn't going to do it, I would go hungry," she said.

Crystal is one of the countless young people in the United States swept into the foster-care-to-sex-trafficking pipeline every year. "Unlike a drug, which is sold once, a person can be sold for sex thousands of times a year, with little risk since sex traffickers are rarely prosecuted," said human rights activist Molly Gochman, who received the Children's Rights Champion Award this year for her work to fight sex trafficking.

In 2012, according to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 67 percent of young people reported missing and likely trafficked were in the care of social services or foster care at the time. And in 2013, 60 percent of the over 100 child sex trafficking victims recovered in an FBI raid of more than 70 cities had been in foster care or group homes at some point.

Experts point to several reasons young people who spend time in foster care are susceptible to traffickers — such as their histories of abuse, neglect and trauma, and the lack of people to rely on when they age out of care without families.

"Any child may be vulnerable to someone who promises to meet their emotional or physical needs, but children with no permanent home are particularly vulnerable," John D. Ryan, CEO of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, said when he testified before a Congressional committee on the issue last year. "Children in foster care are easy targets for pimps. These children are the most susceptible to the manipulation and false promises that traffickers use to secure their trust and dependency. These children have fractured safety nets and few alternatives."

According to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center, sex trafficking is defined as:  
*"the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age."*

## EFFECTING CHANGE

"Most people don't realize the strong connection between the deep flaws in the foster care system and human trafficking in the United States," said Sandy Santana, interim executive director of Children's Rights. "This epidemic of foster youth being lured into the sex trade is devastating our kids, and reforming child welfare is one of the most effective ways to prevent it."

Children's Rights is combating sex trafficking through comprehensive legal campaigns that compel states to vigilantly screen foster homes, reduce caseloads so caseworkers can give children the attention they need, provide kids essential mental health care to heal from trauma and move children between homes less often. The organization is also fighting for youth to be safely reunited with their families or adopted in a timely manner, and if they must age out of care, to have skills to make it on their own and connections they can rely on.

"When children are placed in foster care, at the very least states must ensure they are safe," Santana said. "If young people can't be returned home, or linked with permanent, loving families, it is crucial that they leave care with supportive networks of people they can turn to, and the skills to survive so they won't be lured into dangerous situations."

Lawmakers are also recognizing the need to stem the flow of foster youth into sex trafficking. In September, President Obama signed the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act. Among other provisions, the law requires states to develop policies to identify foster youth who are at risk of or already have been trafficked and provide them appropriate services. It also calls for states to quickly locate and assess kids who run from care, and report to the federal government statistics on the number of youth trafficked each year.

## GETTING OUT

Crystal, now 23, said she managed to escape the sex trade after a man who already paid for time with her couldn't follow through with it, and gave her extra money to get out. "He kept saying, 'You're too beautiful, you're too smart, you need to make something of yourself.' It made me cry," Crystal said. "I had already given up on myself. I didn't think anybody would care about me."

Crystal is now working to raise awareness about trafficking and wants to help other victims. She shared some of her story at Children's Rights' Ninth Annual Benefit in October. "This happens to so many young women right under our noses," she told the crowd. "No young lady plans to be a sex slave."



# IN THE COURTROOM

Children's Rights and co-counsel are preparing for a December trial in **Texas**. *M.D. v. Perry* asserts that massive structural failures in Texas' child welfare system place the 12,000 kids in the state system of long-term foster care at unreasonable risk of physical and psychological harm.

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Children's Rights recently presented oral arguments to a panel of judges at the 1st Circuit Court of Appeals in Boston. CR and local counsel Nutter, McClennen & Fish brought the class action against Massachusetts' Department of Children and Families (DCF) on behalf of all children in state care.

Lead Counsel Sara Bartosz argued that the district court erroneously held vulnerable children, who are wholly dependent on the state for their safety and well-being, to a standard of constitutional proof no less burdensome than that used to assess the rights of incarcerated felons. She also maintained that the district court disregarded case law by using lack of funding to excuse constitutional violations and cast aside its own sweeping findings of problems plaguing DCF.

As we await a decision, the state is still failing on a number of critical foster care measures. Recently released interim data from the Children's Bureau showed that Massachusetts ranked last among 48 reporting states on maltreatment in foster care. In addition, 14 percent of kids in **Massachusetts** who were abused or neglected were re-victimized within a year, fifth worst among 48 reporting states.



CR argued for MA foster care reform before the 1st Circuit Court of Appeals at the John Joseph Moakley U.S. Courthouse in Boston.

# REFORM WATCH

**Connecticut** continued to place fewer young children in institutions and group homes. Between May 2013 and August 2014, the state reduced the number of children 12 and under living in congregate care settings by nearly 30 percent.

**Michigan** rolled out a new statewide child welfare data system that stands to greatly increase transparency and provide better outcomes for children. In addition, the state recently ensured that 99 percent of child welfare caseworkers were completing their in-service training requirements.

**Atlanta** is now doing a better job of keeping children with the same case managers, with DeKalb and Fulton Counties hitting the goal 97 percent of the time.

In **Milwaukee** kids are being adopted more quickly. The system more than doubled the percentage of adoptions finalized within two years of children entering foster care, from only 14 percent in 2003 to 37 percent this year.

**Tennessee** is continuing to meet standards for placement stability. During 2013, 93 percent of children in foster care had two or fewer placements within the previous 12 months.



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## DID YOU KNOW?

**A**n estimated 100,000 to 300,000 American children are at risk of being sex trafficked in the United States each year.

**O**n average, victims are first trafficked into the commercial sex trade between the ages of 11 and 14.

**C**hildren who experience sexual abuse are 28 times more likely to be arrested for prostitution at some point in their lives.

To make a gift to Children's Rights, visit  
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and click "Donate Now."