

# NOTES FROM THE FIELD

FROM  
THE



THE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2018

INSIDE:



#RideForKids: Our first-ever Children's Rights Champion Ride was a rolling success!

KEEP THEM  
TOGETHER



50,000+ signatures & counting! Stop separating children from their families at the U.S. border.

IN FOCUS:

## Children of the Opioid Crisis: A Growing Number



Stephanie's adopted children are survivors of the opioid crisis

No matter what you've been through, when you walk in our door, you're family."

For Stephanie Anuszewski, unconditional love is key to caring for her 11 children, including four children adopted out of foster care. One of those children, David, was born addicted to opioids.

Stephanie, of Scranton, Pennsylvania, adopted David in 2013. Now 7 years old, David was born with telltale signs of opiate withdrawal including respiratory issues and difficulty with motor skills. His baby teeth grew in damaged and prone to cavities, which his dentist ascribed to prenatal drug use.

All four of Stephanie's adopted children are biological siblings. Their birth mother lost custody of her children when she overdosed in public on prescription pain meds and other substances. Police found her on the side of the road, with David in a baby carriage next to her.

Across the country, thousands of children like David and his siblings are entering foster care because one or both parents are addicted to opioids. The numbers paint a startling portrait: Between 2012 and 2016, the number of children in foster care increased by over 10 percent – bringing the total number of children in care to nearly half a million. This

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# ON THE FRONTLINES

## FROM CR'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

"We deserved to get a lawsuit ... we're better off for it, the kids are better off and I think the taxpayers are better off."

That's what Jim Henry, Deputy to the Tennessee Governor and former Commissioner of the child welfare agency, said about the state's remarkable transformation of its child welfare system.

It's a revealing recognition from a former defendant in our case. Indeed, hundreds of thousands of kids in this country are better off thanks to Children's Rights' aggressive grassroots advocacy, dogged determination and steely resolve.

Sadly, the need for our work—both in the core area of child welfare and beyond—has only increased as policies and practices at the federal and state levels continue to place vulnerable children and their families in harm's way.

In the ongoing immigration crackdown, for example, a 7-year-old girl was separated from her mother. Originally from the Congo, they came to the U.S. seeking asylum; instead, the little girl was sent to a detention center in Chicago, while her mother was detained in an immigration center 2,000 miles away in San Diego.

Children's Rights was proud to support the ACLU in their lawsuit against the government on the family's behalf, which finally led to their reunion months later.

We are also proud to advocate for young victims of sex trafficking, children in juvenile justice facilities held in solitary confinement and denied mental health care, and LGBTQ youth discriminated against in the very systems meant to protect them. We are fighting for our country's most vulnerable children, speaking out when government policies fail them.

To continue to do so, we need you. There are many ways to lend your voice. You can help amplify our message on social media. You can tell your friends about our work. And you can attend one of our fundraising events or become a donor. Every new supporter, every mind changed, every dollar raised counts.

With limited resources, we can't fight every battle in every place, but we must do all we can to protect even more children and families in these perilous times. We must make sure that children all around our country have the stability, support and care they so richly deserve.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sandy Santana".

Sandy Santana  
Executive Director

# CR INSIDER: GREG HECHT

With more than 30 years of practice, **Greg Hecht** is the Principal Attorney at Hecht Walker, P.C. He has an accomplished history of advocating for children, both as State Senator and State Representative in the Georgia General Assembly where he authored numerous child abuse prevention laws, and on the board of Families First, a shelter and counseling provider to abused and neglected children and families. Greg and his wife Cheri are the proud adoptive parents of two girls who started their lives in foster care. Instrumental in helping expand Children's Rights' presence in Atlanta and the Southeast, Greg combines visionary ideals with pragmatic know-how when it comes to using the law to protect children.

## What inspired you to get involved with Children's Rights?

Children's Rights moves the needle to protect vulnerable children like no other organization. As a former Assistant District Attorney for four years, I handled many child abuse cases where we saw the critical need for protection and services. As a legislator, we passed significant laws and appropriations to protect children, but we were devastated when the following years some of these measures were rolled back or removed. Children's Rights is exactly the kind of organization that we wanted to work with to create lasting change.

## How does being a father affect your outlook on child welfare?

My wife and I are the adoptive parents of

two girls who were placed in foster care at birth. We understand the trauma children suffer in a system where they are torn away from their homes and moved continually from one place to the next with little to no mental healthcare services.

## Why should Children's Rights have a strong presence in the Southeastern region?

There is a real opportunity here to make a difference for children in need. The South is a dynamic region of the country with tremendous growth, resources, and people who care. We have to make sure that legislatures in the South and the rest of the country are responsive to the needs of our country's children, which is why we are so excited about Children's Rights establishing a southeastern base in Atlanta.



## Your vision for Children's Rights in the Southeast:

We need to safeguard our children so they have the critical mental and physical healthcare services they desperately need. We need to protect children from abuse, whether they are in the juvenile justice system, foster care, or under other state supervision. And finally, we need to make sure that children are not discriminated against or bullied for any reason, and that they are protected by the law.

Join us at the **Children's Rights Atlanta Inspiration Awards** on November 9, 2018! RSVP: [childrensrights.org/atlanta](http://childrensrights.org-atlanta)

# Got Hope?

**B**ring HOPE wherever you go with this golden pin designed by **Ronald Draper**, renowned artist and member of the Children's Rights Young Professional Leadership Council.

Formerly in foster care himself, Ronald now aims to inspire with his art. "I wanted to show that positivity is very possible and something that we need to continue to hope and aim for," he says. "Art allows for understanding and compassion in a way that transcends language. I believe in the power of using art to create impossible change."

Ronald is generously donating all proceeds from the "hope" pin to Children's Rights' legal work for neglected and abused children across America. Purchase yours today at [www.ronalddraperart.com/hope](http://www.ronalddraperart.com/hope).



We're delighted to introduce you to our new logo, **Hope!**

Hope is Resilience.  
Hope is Protection.  
**Hope** is **Children's Rights!**



# Children's Rights Champion Ride

## #RideForKids

On Sunday, May 6th, cyclists from the NYC area gathered for a morning ride and fundraiser for Children's Rights. This first-time event raised over \$25,000 to help advance our new legal action campaigns on behalf of children in state foster care, education, immigration and juvenile justice systems. Please email us at [development@childrensrights.org](mailto:development@childrensrights.org) to join the mailing list for our 2019 event or find out how to bring this event to your community. Special thanks to our sponsors, event partners and donors for making this inaugural event such a success.

Photos: Children's Rights Champion Ride 2018, NYC.  
Photos courtesy of Unit Nutrition by Marco Quezada  
[www.marcoquezada.com](http://www.marcoquezada.com).



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A hearty thanks to our Cycling Network International volunteers for keeping us safe!



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# IN FOCUS: Children of the Opioid Crisis: A Growing Number

upsurge disrupted a decade-long downward trend. In the last eight years, the number of child removals in which substance abuse is a factor has nearly quadrupled, particularly in regions with higher levels of opioid prescribing and opioid deaths.

In Indiana, one of the states with the biggest increases in their foster care population, experts attribute the sudden influx to the opioid epidemic.

"This isn't a trickle. This isn't a wave. It's a tsunami," Indianapolis Judge Marilyn Moores said in an interview with NBC. "It seems like there's a whole generation of people disappearing."

The result? In many states, an overburdened child welfare system ill-equipped to meet the rising need. As children flood the foster care system, budgets are stretched, caseworkers are overloaded, and safe homes that can meet kids' needs are limited.

"My foster home is closed currently because I'm at capacity," Stephanie says. Since 2008, she has fostered more than 20 children. But across the country, the demand for suitable homes far outpaces the availability.

Congress has recognized the urgent need for reform, particularly by directing resources toward prevention services for parents and families so that children do not

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have to enter foster care in the first place. In February, the Family First Prevention Services Act was signed into law, providing funds for preventive services such as in-home training, family therapy, and substance abuse programs. In March, Congress raised the funding level for Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act state grants from \$25 million to \$85 million. Partly in response to the opioid crisis, the funds will help states protect infants exposed to controlled substances.

These measures are only a start. States must invest in evidence-based drug treatment, mental health, and counseling programs that help keep families together. For kids who must depend on out-of-home care, leaders have to re-engineer foster care systems so that they actually provide the stability young people need.

"Every child deserves to know that someone loves them and will get them where they need to be," Stephanie says. We need to create a future where that kind of support is available to every child.

P.S. We're hosting **Children of the Opioid Epidemic**,

a breakfast briefing & panel on June 19, 2018.

Learn more: [childrensrights.org/opioid-panel](http://childrensrights.org/opioid-panel)

## SIGN OUR PETITION Stop separating children from their families at the U.S. border.

In April, Children's Rights launched a petition against the Trump Administration's policy of separating children and their families at the U.S. border. Since October 2017, **more than 700 children have been separated along the southwest border from adults claiming to be their parents, including 100 children under the age of 4**, the New York Times reports.

Lead Counsel Christina Wilson Remlin denounced the cruel policy on CNN en Español, and Executive Director Sandy Santana was quoted in the Daily Beast: "Needlessly ripping kids, toddlers, babies away from their parents is inhumane, barbaric and unconstitutional ... An administration that purports to uphold family values is callously inflicting devastating trauma on children and families in service of its punitive immigration policies."

All signatures will be delivered to Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen. So far,

we've gathered **more than 50,000 signatures** — and that count keeps growing! Now more than ever, we need your voice too. Add your name today:

[childrensrights.org/KeepThemTogether](http://childrensrights.org/KeepThemTogether)



# Fighting for Children in Florida

**“W**hy am I good enough for one week, but not good enough to stay?”

That's what L.T., a 16-year-old girl in foster care in South Florida, asked after being repeatedly shuffled from one placement to the next. In her more than four years in Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) custody, she had at least 17 placements and 25 placement moves, some lasting no more than several hours.

Unfortunately, the instability L.T. experienced is all too common. There is a widespread shortage of foster homes in Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties, putting children at risk of harm as their developmental and educational needs are cast aside and their mental health needs go unmet.

In February, Children's Rights and international law firm Baker McKenzie filed *H.G. v. Carroll*, a federal class-action lawsuit on behalf of the approximately 2,000 children in foster care in Florida's “Southern Region.”

The lawsuit charges that the state has long failed to address this known drastic shortage of foster homes—with dangerous results. In at least two documented cases, children in state care tragically committed suicide after experiencing unsafe and unstable living conditions, including sexual abuse. Additionally, infants and toddlers are warehoused in emergency shelters and group homes, robbing them of the family environment they desperately need.

Kids are placed wherever there is a bed or a slot and not matched with families that can meet their needs. Children like L.T. experience a staggering number of placement moves. According to the state's own data, of the children who spent time

in Miami-Dade and Monroe County foster care between January 2016 and June 2017, 435 kids lived in 10 or more places; 187 kids lived in 20 or more places; 54 children lived in at least 50 places; and 27 children were bounced around between 80 and 140 placements during their total time in state care.

“There is long-term harm when kids are treated like ping pong balls, or when infants are warehoused in shelters and group homes,” added Ira Lustbader, litigation director for Children's Rights. “Extreme instability and unnecessary institutionalization can physically damage children's developing brains, impacting their learning and behavior. You might as well say, ‘We're not giving you a fair shot in life.’”

An immediate effort by DCF to have the case dismissed was swiftly rejected by the federal court in Tallahassee. The state said the plaintiff children failed to assert clearly enough that the Department has policies or customs that put all children at risk of harm. The Court found “the complaint alleges in unmistakable clarity that the Department routinely treats children this way.”

Writing in the Miami Herald, local attorneys Bernard Perlmutter, Robert Latham, and Stewart Cooke—who represent kids in foster care with special needs—voiced the urgent need for this action: “Any parent can tell you that this is no way to treat a child. As local attorneys representing young people in DCF's care, we have a legal and moral obligation to act.”

Through this lawsuit, Children's Rights seeks system-wide changes that will prevent ongoing harms to foster children in DCF custody.

## Calling to the Stage: Broadway's Jordan Roth



Jordan Roth, Broadway producer and emcee extraordinaire, will host Children's Rights 2018 Benefit & Inspiration Awards! Children's Rights couldn't be prouder to have Jordan as an ally. As the owner of Jujamcyn Theaters, Jordan was recently recognized for his work on four Tony Award-nominated Broadway shows, including *Angels in America*, *Frozen*, *Mean Girls*, and *Springsteen on Broadway*. Our 2018 Benefit & Inspiration Awards is one performance you don't want to miss! Save the date: October 16, 2018. See back page for more details.



PROTECTING KIDS.  
PROVIDING HOPE.

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[www.childrensrights.org](http://www.childrensrights.org)

## SAVE THE DATE!

All proceeds from our events sponsor advocacy and action for children who suffer in America's broken state systems.



### 2018 Children's Rights Benefit & Inspiration Awards

From moving personal stories to beautiful waterfront views, this year's **Benefit & Inspiration Awards** on October 16, 2018 at the Chelsea Lighthouse will take your breath away! Stay tuned for information about our honorees. To reserve tickets and tables, contact Megan Lewis at [mlewis@childrensrights.org](mailto:mlewis@childrensrights.org) or visit [childrensrights.org/inspiration](http://childrensrights.org/inspiration).

OCT 16  
NYC

### 2018 Children's Rights Atlanta Inspiration Awards

Children's Rights is establishing a strong presence in the Southeastern region. Join us for the inaugural **Children's Rights Atlanta Inspiration Awards** on November 9, 2018 at the Cherokee Town and Country Club. To reserve tickets and tables, contact Kathleen Rivera at [krivera@childrensrights.org](mailto:krivera@childrensrights.org) or visit [childrensrights.org-atlanta](http://childrensrights.org-atlanta).

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To make a gift to Children's Rights, visit [www.childrensrights.org](http://www.childrensrights.org) and click "Donate Now."