

Children's Rights

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<https://www.childrensrights.org/cr-insider-health-victories-in-the-time-of-covid/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing



Meet McClain Bryant Macklin.

When a federal judge [approved](#) a settlement last January in a class action case brought by Children's Rights and local partners in Kansas, he said it provides real value to the more than 7,000 children in the foster care system. McClain Bryant Macklin remembers how good it felt to know her organization, [Health Forward Foundation](#), had played a role in making change happen.

Q: Can you tell us about Health Forward?

Health Forward Foundation works to transform communities in our service area in Kansas and Missouri so everyone has an opportunity for better health. We know success starts with the social and political systems that can be resistant to change. We define health very broadly because access to care is just one part of the equation. We saw an opportunity to improve health outcomes for children of color by supporting the child welfare reform campaign in Kansas, [MB v. Colyer](#). These children's mental health needs were not being met, in fact were being exacerbated by the lack of [stability](#) in their lives. The grant Health Forward made helped to change these children's circumstances and will hopefully lead to brighter futures and overall better health.

Q: What is your role?

As Director of Policy and Strategic Initiatives my role is to advocate on behalf of individuals in our service population and to offer resources to create systems change for better health in our service area. Our policy agenda for 2021- 2022 looks squarely at race equity and economic equity in the context of public health, and looks upstream at the social and political determinants of health to help shape conditions in which people can thrive.

Q: You have an MBA and a JD. What drew you to policy work?

I was raised by my parents to serve my community. My first year in grad school I got the chance to intern on Capitol Hill and fell in love with the legislative process. I didn't want my MBA to go to waste so the question was how could I meld the two? Advocating on behalf of organizations seemed like a way to blend my business education with my public policy interests. My father, a lawyer, had always encouraged me to go to law school. He thought public policy would be too limiting. The way things turned out, earning a law degree helped get me where I am. Law school led me to a private firm that encouraged community involvement and had a public policy practice. I met Sly James, the first black partner at the firm, when he mediated the first matter I worked on. I wound up fundraising for his campaign for mayor of Kansas City and joined his transition team, later serving as his policy director. I have been squarely in public policy roles since. It was a roundabout path to just where I wanted to be.

Q: You joined Health Forward in 2020. How was navigating a new job in the middle of a pandemic?

It was a great time to join Health Forward. When the organization announced the appointment of Qiana Thomason as President/CEO in January of 2020 it was big news in Kansas City, as it was the first time a black woman became head of a major foundation in the Kansas City area. And word spread quickly that Health Forward was putting equity at the forefront of its work. I had never been in philanthropy, but with my background in the law, government and civic work, I saw an opportunity to take my experience as a policy generalist and narrow into the social influencers of health that contribute to poor health outcomes like housing, transportation, digital and economic equity. On a personal level, it was an interesting time to onboard. I've been homeschooling a toddler and remote working since March 2020. But the Health Forward team has been so supportive and welcoming of me and understanding about what I know and don't know. I really look forward to when we can be together. I am a relationship-driven person. I miss watercooler conversations and impromptu lunches.

Q: What's one thing about Health Forward that's guaranteed to make you smile?

When I joined last year our #1 priority was passing the Medicaid expansion ballot initiative in Missouri. When the voters spoke and the constitutional amendment passed, it was a joyous occasion. I was thrown into a huge initiative on my first day, and was proud to contribute to its success. It was so fulfilling.

Q: Is there someone from your youth who really influenced your career path?

It pains me to say this, because growing up I thought he was so square, but that would be my dad. He told me I would be a lawyer, so I

was determined that I would not. But his impact on me was so powerful. He ran Missouri's oldest political organization, and from a very young age I went with him to meetings and watched and learned. He packed his parenting with so much teaching. Community service became engrained in me. He is my model and mentor; my best friend and confidant.

Q: What made CR and our approach a good fit for Health Forward?

Children's Rights just proves there are all sorts of ways to tackle an issue. Taking a legal path to systems change was different for us. But because the focus of the case was mental health, and on forcing a system to change because they were doing a disservice to the very children they were supposed to be serving, it really appealed to us. And when the Kansas case settled, the impact was so huge! It feels great to know that children with so much stacked against them will be getting more stability and the mental health care they need. Children's Rights success is a reminder that philanthropy should be open-minded and willing to innovate when an opportunity comes along to make a big change.

Q: Your first name is so wonderful and unique. Howd you get it?

All my immediate family have names that begin with the letter M. I was named after my mother's godparents. Growing up I didn't like it because it was different. But I've come to learn it's a real asset. I cannot tell you how often I am called Mr. Bryant. I love it. I prefer for people not to see me coming.

First Name	Last Name
Email Address	