

Champions for Children

by Jane Michaels

Editor's Note: This article continues the series inspired by DBA President Mary Jo Gross, where guest columnists write about their volunteer/charity involvement.

As exciting and challenging as it can be to assist corporate clients in resolving difficult legal issues, there is nothing more personally and professionally satisfying than helping a child who is in dire need. That's why I feel particularly privileged to serve as a member of the Board of Directors of the Rocky Mountain Children's Law Center.

The Rocky Mountain Children's Law Center is a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting children and promoting healthy families. The Center's major goals are to ensure that every child is safe from abuse and neglect, lives in a permanent home, gets individual attention, receives sensitive interventions, and has zealous advocacy to enforce these rights.

Now approaching its 25th anniversary, the Center was founded in 1981 by Shari Shink, a lawyer who is passionate about her mission to provide legal representation for abused, neglected and abandoned children. I've seen the Center tackle seemingly insurmountable challenges and achieve systemic reform through legislative and other changes. Heroes come in unlikely places — ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances. For thousands of troubled children, everyone can be a hero. The staff and volunteers of the Rocky Mountain Children's Law Center are champions for these children.

The Unspeakable Horror

It's tough to think about child abuse. We don't want to believe it. But it happens — to innocent, powerless children. Fathers who rape their two-year old toddlers. Mothers who put cigarettes out on the arms of their infants. Children who are routinely bartered for drugs and sex. Every hour, a child in Colorado is abused or neglected. There are more than 9,000 children in foster care in our state on any given day, but only 840 of those children in foster care were adopted last year. Many children fall through the cracks of the system, and someone needs to be there to catch them.

Everyday Heroes

The staff of the Center show unwavering dedication and steadfast advocacy for abused and neglected children. The Center helps children by representing these voiceless victims in courtrooms around the state, by responding to crisis calls, educating and supporting foster parents, training judges and

law students (locally and nationally), providing therapeutic gardening opportunities for abused children, and recruiting and training volunteer lawyers. In fact, the Center could not realize its mission without the commitment of volunteer lawyers who donate an average of \$500,000 in legal services annually.

The Center recently recognized two of its many outstanding volunteer lawyers. Dan Dunn was honored for spending more than 350 hours of time in a complex interstate custody battle. Because of his fervent advocacy and persistence, Dan persuaded the local court to grant permanent legal custody to a grandmother of two young victims of abuse and neglect. Now these sisters are safe and living in a loving home — far from the

chaos of their early childhood years. Janet Savage

and "Women Working Together" at Davis Graham & Stubbs were also honored

for their partnership to provide more than 20 attorneys who selflessly volunteered countless hours of their time to take on cases representing the Center's child clients.

Out of the Mouth of Babes

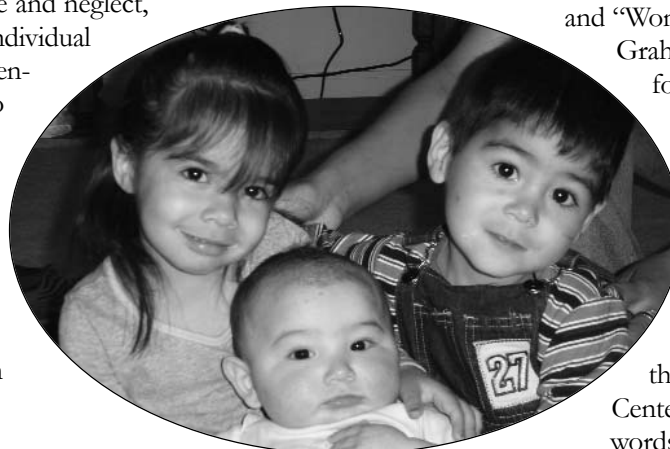
At a recent dinner to support the Rocky Mountain Children's Law Center, the audience heard the moving words of JC, a 15-year-old boy who credits the Center for literally saving his life — giving him hope and placing him in a home with a loving family. JC is

helping the Center by speaking around the country, trying desperately to save other children from the trauma of abuse he once experienced. After he recently spoke at a national conference in Florida and received a standing ovation, a Michigan judge who heard his words said she would never again rule in a child's case without thinking about the lessons he had taught her. JC escaped the horrors of unspeakable abuse. Many more children still need help.

How You Can Help

While the Rocky Mountain Children's Law Center helps hundreds of children each year, the need is still far greater. The Center needs your support! We are always looking for solo practitioners, as well as small, medium and large law firms to join the army of volunteer attorneys who have assisted the Center by providing legal advocacy for a child or mentoring to a student. If you are interested in being a champion for children by donating your expertise, time, office supplies or money, please contact Shari Shink at (303) 692-1165.

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Serena, Angelo and Jose — three children who've been helped by the Center.