



2011 ANNUAL REPORT



EAST BAY
CHILDREN'S
LAW OFFICES

WHY DO CHILDREN NEED LAWYERS?

I often wonder what a child thinks about that first night he or she is in foster care. Maybe it's the first calm in a while after all the loud madness and chaos or violence at home, or maybe the strange surroundings are just too quiet and terrifying. I'm sure they wonder, What is going to happen to me? Where are my parents? Does anyone care about what I have to say?

Children need lawyers because they are not merely subjects of their case—they should be treated as active participants in their own lives. Children have rights. From decisions about where they live and what school they attend, to whether they have enough clothes, children's lawyers empower the voice of children and enforce their rights to being safe, being treated with dignity and respect, and to be connected to their families. Unfortunately, many youth in foster care face incredible challenges and do not always have the support they need to be successful. Many foster youth do not understand or even know that they have legal rights.

Our clients have been abused, neglected or abandoned in often traumatic ways, and now find themselves in a legal system of not only child welfare law, but also special education, public benefits, immigration and more. Children's lawyers are absolutely essential to ensuring that children's needs are met by navigating this tangled web, holding accountable the very system that is designed to protect children and breaking

down communication barriers between agencies obligated by law to provide services to our children.

Sometimes, the lawyer's job is to do the big things—like protecting a baby with 17 broken bones from being sent home against expert medical advice. Or to make sure that children are not placed in overly restrictive placements or overly medicated because of behavior problems. Or to protect a child's right to visit his siblings from whom he was separated by the system. But sometimes it's the little things—like securing a donation of tickets to the musical Billy Elliot for a six year old boy who loves to sing and dance. Regardless, the passionate and tireless advocacy of EBCLC attorneys and social workers makes a difference to Alameda County's foster youth.

In these tumultuous economic times, we want to extend our sincere gratitude towards you—our family, friends, community members and donors—for all of the support you have so generously bestowed upon East Bay Children's Law Offices. Together we can continue to accomplish amazing things for children.

Roger Chan
Executive Director

Kathy Siegel
Board Chairperson

EMPOWERING THE VOICE OF FOSTER CHILDREN IN
THE DECISION-MAKING THAT IMPACTS THEIR LIVES.

DEPENDENCY ADVOCACY PROGRAM

At the core of East Bay Children's Law Offices' work is speaking up for children each and every day in courtrooms across Alameda County. Children need a strong, consistent voice in the intimidating adult world that is juvenile court, and EBCLO is there to provide it.

Take, for instance, the case of Manuel—a wheel chair bound child with muscular dystrophy. At the age of 12, Manuel was hospitalized for a major surgery. Child Protective Services got involved when it became apparent that his aging grandparents could no longer meet his medical and physical needs. EBCLO was appointed to represent Manuel in juvenile court where the decisions about his care would take place. Manuel wanted to live with his family. After two months in his hospital

bed because CPS could not find an appropriate home for him, a distant relative volunteered to care for him. However, the relative soon found herself in the middle of a bureaucratic battle over which government agency would help with his special needs. As a result, she could not equip her home or vehicle to accommodate Manuel's wheelchair; she could not afford the nursing assistance required to keep him out of the hospital; and she was losing her job and her home while she struggled to meet Manuel's medical needs. Manuel's caretaker turned to EBCLO for solutions. Realizing that Manuel would end up institutionalized without intervention, Manuel's attorney went to bat for Manuel, ensuring that every source available properly provided for his needs. She filed motions, she objected, she collaborated, she unrelentingly advocated and, ultimately, she prevailed. Manuel now enjoys the stability of knowing that his dedicated caretaker is now his permanent guardian—something EBCLO helped make happen in juvenile court.



IN 2010

- **2,300 children** were served by EBCLO
- EBCLO attorneys appeared at approximately **6,000 court hearings** throughout Alameda County.
- EBCLO social workers traveled more than **30,000 miles** visiting children and families

Representing children is an opportunity to affect the course of children's lives every day. That's why EBCLO partners our Youth Advocate Social Workers with our staff attorneys so we can address the whole child's needs. In each child's life, our social worker/attorney teams seek to make a positive impact by developing relationships with children and their caregivers and understanding the individual needs each child has so that the juvenile court understands those needs and makes the right decisions about every child's future.



“ IF IT WASN'T FOR THE HOPE MY LAWYER GAVE ME, I DON'T KNOW WHERE I'D BE TODAY. HAVING HER LISTEN TO ME WAS THE FIRST TIME I FELT MY VOICE WAS RELEVANT, AND SHE MADE GETTING MY NEEDS MET LESS INTIMIDATING FOR ME. ”

- Former Client of an EBCLO Attorney

EDUCATION ADVOCACY PROGRAM

East Bay Children's Law Offices launched its Education Advocacy Program (EAP) in August 2010 in recognition of the fact that a child faces increased barriers to success when in foster care. Foster youth can be dramatically impacted by frequent changes in where they live and consequently attend school, and by not having their educational needs properly identified and addressed. In 2010, 80 EBCLO clients were assisted by the EAP Education Attorney to receive appropriate educational placements and services and to protect their rights to school stability and academic success.

IN 2010

- 95% of children referred to EAP for special education concerns received new or increased school services.
- 89% of children referred to EAP for discipline action were not expelled from their schools.
- 95% of children referred to EAP to maintain school stability were helped to either immediately enroll in school or keep their school of origin.
- 10 Volunteers matched with EBCLO clients to be an educational surrogate.



“ AS A CHILD WELFARE WORKER, WORKING WITH FAMILIES CAN BE A CHALLENGE FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS. TO HAVE AN EDUCATIONAL ADVOCATE COME ALONGSIDE AND JOIN THE TEAM MAKES THE STATEMENT THAT WE CARE. I MUST CONFESS THAT WITHOUT THE SUPPORT, RESOURCES AND INTERACTION . . . WE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SUCCESSFULLY DISMISS A FAMILY THAT HAD BEEN IN THE SYSTEM FOR 8 YEARS. THIS IS A RESOURCE WORTH KEEPING. ”

- Child Welfare Worker of EBCLO Client

PROBATE GUARDIANSHIP COUNSEL FOR CHILDREN PROGRAM



Also new to East Bay Children's Law Offices is the Probate Guardianship Counsel for Children Program. At the request of the Alameda County Superior Court, EBCLO began representing children subject to guardianship petitions in Probate Court. Like EBCLO's foster youth population, these children are also not able to live with their parents. EBCLO attorneys and social workers evaluate the homes where the children are living, provide referrals to services the family might need, collaborate with other court and Social Services providers and make recommendations to the court about how to achieve stability for the children.

“ THIS IS A LETTER OF THANKS TO ALL WHO MADE MY DREAM A REALITY. AND THAT IS BEING ABLE TO RAISE MY GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER TO BE A WONDERFUL HUMAN BEING—A PERSON OF HONESTY AND INTEGRITY. SHE IS SUCH A BLESSING IN MY LIFE. ”

- Probate Legal Guardian of EBCLO Client

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