



CONNECTICUT VOICES FOR CHILDREN

*Honoring voices who have made a difference for
Connecticut's children, youth and families.*



2013 First for Kids Celebration

November 6, 2013
5:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.

Pond House Café
1555 Asylum Avenue
West Hartford, Connecticut

About Connecticut Voices for Children

Connecticut Voices for Children believes that every child should have the opportunity to reach his or her full potential: to grow up in a healthy environment, to enter school ready to learn, and to reach adulthood prepared to succeed. Through quality research, strategic communications, community engagement and fiscal analysis, we identify and advance strategic public investments to make our vision a reality.

Research and Policy Analysis

Connecticut Voices takes an interdisciplinary approach to our work, integrating research and best practice policies across issue areas including early care and child development, elementary and secondary education, health care, foster care, juvenile justice, family economic security, and tax and budget. We share our research and recommendations through public presentations, issue briefs and media outreach. Significant reports over the past year include:

- Arresting Development: Student Arrests in Connecticut
- The State of Working Connecticut 2013: Young People in the Workforce
- Confronting the Cap: Modeling the Impact of Two Changes to Connecticut's Spending Cap
- Reality Check: Who Pays Taxes in Connecticut?
- The Governor's Proposed Fiscal Year 2014-15 Budget: The Impact on Children

Advocating for Change

Connecticut Voices works to advance sound policy choices necessary for the health and well-being of our youngest residents. Our comprehensive advocacy strategy builds upon our research and policy analysis to create the public and political will necessary to drive change. Through coalitions, we seek to build a statewide voice for change. Through

advocacy at the Capitol, we work with policymakers to advance specific legislative and regulatory initiatives. Through ongoing assessment and analysis, we track policy changes to ensure that public investments yield the intended results.

Leadership Development

Connecticut Voices actively fosters the next generation of policy leadership by offering two-year policy fellowships to exceptional recent college graduates with a strong interest in advancing public policy to benefit children and youth. Some of our policy fellows have become Truman and Rhodes Scholars; attended law, business, medical, public health, and other graduate schools; run for public office; worked for state and federal governments; and become executive directors of nonprofit organizations.

Real Results

Policy changes resulting from our advocacy are producing real results for Connecticut families:

- Hundreds more children have early education opportunities in school readiness programs.
- More children in foster care are remaining in the schools they attend rather than suffering the disruption of changing schools each time their foster placements change.
- Over 180,000 low-income, working households received a boost from the new Connecticut Earned Income Tax Credit.
- More children in the care of the Department of Children and Families are living with relatives, rather than in institutions.
- Thousands more children, parents, and pregnant women are getting the health care they need through the HUSKY health insurance program.

2013 First for Kids Ceremony

*Musical entertainment provided by the ACES Educational Center for the Arts:
Will Brennan, guitar, Andrew Fermo, piano, Nick Morcaldi, drums, and Roy Wiseman, bass*

Welcome

Jean Adnopo, Chair, Board of Directors
Ellen Shemitz, Executive Director

Lifetime Achievement Award

Presented by Governor Dannel P. Malloy

David Nee

Executive Director, Graustein Memorial Fund

State Policy Leadership Award

Presented by Peter Arakas

Commissioner Joette Katz

Department of Children and Families

Legislative Leadership Award

Presented by Robert Cotto, Jr.

Representative Jason Rojas

Connecticut General Assembly

Public Service Award

Presented by Patricia Baker

United Way of Connecticut/2-1-1

Closing Remarks

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

David Nee



In July 2013, the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund announced that David Nee, the Fund's only executive director

since it opened its doors in Connecticut, would be retiring from his position at the helm of the foundation. Even at the time of this announcement, Mr. Nee knew that retirement was just a new beginning, telling a local newspaper, "I can't imagine myself sitting around and clipping coupons."

This would not come as a surprise to those who know Mr. Nee, who has spent the past two-decades tirelessly bringing together communities, advocates, funders, and policy makers to support the growth and development of the state's youngest residents.

David Nee became the first executive director of the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund in 1993. His philosophy of inclusion, listening, and collaboration is the cornerstone of the Memorial Fund's work of improving education for Connecticut's children by supporting school change, informing the public debate on educational issues, and strengthening the involvement of parents and the community in education. The Memorial Fund's Discovery Initiative supports 54 Connecticut communities in developing locally-driven action plans for improving life and educational outcomes for young children. Mr. Nee challenges those seeking change to start with the children and parents who live and attend schools in each community, and to include the voices of those families in the process.

Prior to entering the philanthropic field, Mr. Nee held a variety of positions in corrections at the municipal, federal and state levels, culminating in

his service as Director of the Office of Program Development for the Massachusetts Department of Corrections. Mr. Nee has credited this experience in corrections and the desire to prevent crime rather than incarcerate, as the spark for his passion for early child development.

David Nee's leadership and commitment to supporting the state's children and families have contributed to a number of successes here in Connecticut. Over the past few years many states have chosen to reduce and remove funding for early care and education in the face of the many budget challenges that arose out of the recession. Over this same period Connecticut has instead increased funding for capacity and quality.

The greatest and most recent victory is the creation of a State Office of Early Childhood. The office will reflect Mr. Nee's vision of early childhood – with plans to collaborate with communities, advocates, and funders in an effort to develop a more streamlined, high-quality, and accessible early education system.

Mr. Nee has chaired the board of the Connecticut Council for Philanthropy, where he helped found its Early Childhood Funders Affinity Group. Through this collaborative network of 14 funders, he has worked to pool resources and support the development of an early childhood system in Connecticut.

For his twenty-plus years of service and commitment to children as the Executive Director of the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, as well as his personal dedication to bringing together communities, nonprofit organizations, and state government to advance the well-being of young people, Connecticut Voices for Children presents David Nee with our Lifetime Achievement Award.



STATE POLICY LEADERSHIP AWARD

Commissioner Joette Katz

Three years into her term as Commissioner of Connecticut's Department of Children and Families (DCF),

Joette Katz has earned a reputation as a child-focused reformer, leading substantial changes in the culture and practices of an often besieged agency. She has replaced adversarial, often forensic-style investigations with less disruptive community based interventions that connect families to needed supports and allow more children to remain in family settings. Such changes have made a positive difference in the lives of some of our state's most vulnerable children and have distinguished Commissioner Katz as a Voice for Connecticut's Children.

Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, Commissioner Katz graduated from Brandeis University in 1974 and the University Of Connecticut School of Law in 1977. Governor William O'Neill appointed her to the Connecticut Superior Court in 1989. Three years later, Governor Lowell Weicker elevated her to the State Supreme Court where she served more than 18 years before stepping down in January 2011 to accept her current position as DCF Commissioner.

As Commissioner, Ms. Katz oversees services for 4,000 abused and neglected children. Historically, DCF has struggled to find sufficient family placements for the children in its care, relying instead on expensive, institutional and congregate (group) care settings, and struggling to meet the health and education needs of the children in its custody.

Since taking the helm at DCF, Commissioner Katz has established policies and fostered an organizational culture that encourage DCF

workers to collaborate with families on developing plans to resolve family problems. She has dramatically increased the Department's openness to "kinship care," placing children with family and friends whenever possible, and decreasing placements in traditional foster care or congregate care. As a part of these changes, Commissioner Katz has worked to keep Connecticut's children in Connecticut, prohibiting any out of state placement of children without her individual review and personal approval.

The results of such reforms speak for themselves. Since January 2011, the number of children in the care of DCF has decreased by 18 percent; the number of children in out-of-state placements has decreased by 90 percent. Forty-four percent of DCF-involved children live with a relative, up from 30 percent three years ago, and the share of children residing in congregate care settings has dropped from 30 percent to 22 percent.

Commissioner Katz not only speaks out for children, she also listens, showing respect for the adolescents and young adults in her care. Many youth struggle with the transition out of foster care; Commissioner Katz has solicited the input of some of these youth in her efforts to improve Department policy and practice. Her partnership with DCF's Youth Advisory Boards has resulted in Departmental changes that strengthen protections to keep siblings together in foster care.

For her dedication and tenacity in reforming DCF by reducing our historic overreliance on congregate care, for her child-focused leadership that has helped to keep children with their families, Commissioner Katz has shown herself to be First for Kids. We are pleased to present Commissioner Katz with our State Policy Leadership Award.



LEGISLATIVE LEADERSHIP AWARD

Representative Jason Rojas

Today we honor Representative Jason Rojas for his legislative leadership in support of child and family health and well-being. A third-term legislator serving the communities of East Hartford and Manchester, Representative Rojas has helped to ensure the passage of laws intended to improve educational outcomes, support marginalized students and improve family safety in the context of domestic violence.

He has proposed and continues to work for the passage of bold legislative initiatives addressing access to affordable housing, attention to racial and socio-economic diversity in school choice, and educational support for children in state care. A member of the Education and the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committees, he chairs the Planning and Development Committee and is known by his colleagues as an expert resource with deep understanding of critical legislative proposals.

Representative Rojas works hard and he works smart. As a respected source of credible research and policy analysis, Connecticut Voices applauds Representative Rojas for his attention to and integration of best practices in his legislative proposals.

Take, for example, his contributions to the much discussed education reform bill of 2012. Representative Rojas advocated for a pilot project in 15 Connecticut schools that will use reading assessments, targeted interventions, and well-trained teachers to bolster reading skills. This initiative reflects compelling research on brain development and public health showing the impact of poverty on our youngest children – revealing that poor children enter school an average of two years behind their peers and that early intervention

is key to educational success. Research indicates that if children are reading well by the end of first grade, they will continue to read well. Representative Rojas' legislation increases the odds of success for children from some of Connecticut's poorer neighborhoods.

Representative Rojas also speaks on behalf of too-often unheard youth. Efforts to improve educational quality in Connecticut have largely overlooked "alternative" schools and programs – those targeted to "at risk" students who are not succeeding in traditional schools, often because of behavioral and emotional challenges. While these schools can play a valuable role, they are often not required to publicly report vital educational information that would enable evaluation of their successes and outcomes. Representative Rojas took the lead on legislation that will require reporting on how many students are attending alternative schools and an assessment of how these children are faring academically and the quality of their curricula.

Outside of the legislature, Representative Rojas serves his community in many ways, including as director of community relations at Trinity College in Hartford and as a director on the board of three non-profit organizations that seek to support housing and economic development in Hartford's Frog Hollow neighborhood. A graduate of the University of Connecticut with a master's degree in public policy from Trinity College, Representative Rojas also served his community prior to joining the General Assembly as a member of the East Hartford Town Council and Board of Education.

For his commitment to supporting children's access to equitable, quality educational opportunity, we present Representative Jason Rojas with our Legislative Leadership Award.



PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD

United Way of Connecticut/2-1-1

Connecticut's HUSKY health insurance program can be a lifeline for uninsured children and families. But without a helping hand through the eligibility process, individuals may have a difficult time getting enrolled and staying enrolled in the program, particularly when program rules change or when computer-generated notices are difficult to decipher.

Over the past 15 years, the United Way/2-1-1 HUSKY Infoline has connected over 1.6 million Connecticut residents with multi-lingual specially-trained staff who have provided assistance in signing up for and accessing HUSKY services. Staff at the HUSKY Infoline not only assisted HUSKY applicants directly, but they also facilitated system improvements for HUSKY, identifying and tracking common and repeated challenges that families faced enrolling or accessing services.

This early detection enabled the State to make important system reforms. For example, HUSKY Infoline staff reported that they were fielding repeated calls from parents whose babies turning one and teens turning 18 were losing coverage – even though the children remained eligible. Connecticut Voices for Children reviewed data on enrollment trends and was able to verify that babies and teens were indeed losing coverage at a much higher rate than other children, largely because of confusion about the need to renew health coverage for children in these age groups. In response, the Department took significant steps to reduce the number of one year-olds and teens who inadvertently lost coverage by

revamping notices, training staff, and making other systems improvements. Thanks to the two-way information provided to and by Infoline, more babies and teens are now keeping their HUSKY coverage.

HUSKY Infoline is only one of the many ways in which United Way/2-1-1 provides help for children and families. The United Way of Connecticut assists state residents in obtaining information and a wide variety of critically needed services through its toll-free 2-1-1 call center, and online at www.211ct.org. Founded 37 years ago in 1976, it is an exemplary state government and private non-profit partnership, serving as the model for information and referral systems throughout the United States.

Unfortunately, state funding for the HUSKY Infoline was eliminated by the legislature in the last session, meaning that HUSKY Infoline's one-on-one assistance will no longer be available. Despite the loss of the specialized HUSKY service, United Way/2-1-1 will continue to provide other vital information and referral services, including referrals to Access Health CT, the new health insurance marketplace.

For its dedication to helping Connecticut residents in need or in crisis to access health and human services every day of the year, Connecticut Voices for Children presents United Way/2-1-1, represented today by its CEO Richard "Rick" Porth, with our First For Kids Public Service Award.

Past
First for Kids
Honorees

2012

- ◆ *Legislative Leadership Award* - State Senator Martin Looney
- ◆ *Citizen Advocacy Award* - Merva Jackson (posthumously) and African Caribbean American Parents of Children with Disabilities (AFCAMP)
- ◆ *Connecticut Voices for Children Founders' Award*- Peter Arakas
- ◆ *Community Advocacy Award*- Barbara Edinberg
- ◆ *Media Award*- The Connecticut Mirror

2011

- ◆ *Legislative Leadership Award*- State Senator Beth Bye
- ◆ *Statewide Child Advocacy Award*- Abby Anderson
- ◆ *Transformational Philanthropy Award*- Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative
- ◆ *Youth Leadership Award*- Sixto Cancel

2009

- ◆ *Congressional Leadership Award* - Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro
- ◆ *Legislative Leadership Award*- House Speaker Chris Donovan
- ◆ *Transformational Policy Leadership Award*- New England Alliance for Children's Health
- ◆ *Connecticut Voices for Children Founders' Award*- Dr. Nancy Meyer-Lustman
- ◆ *Media Award*- WNPR's "Where We Live"

2008

- ◆ *State Policy Leader Award*- Attorney General Richard Blumenthal
- ◆ *Legislative Leadership Award* – State Senator Jonathan Harris
- ◆ *Transformational Philanthropy Award*- Connecticut Health Foundation
- ◆ *Community Leadership Award*- Center for Youth Leadership
- ◆ *Priscilla Canny Research Award* - Walter S. Gilliam, Ph.D.
- ◆ *Connecticut Voices for Children Founders' Award*- Shelley Geballe

2006

- ◆ *Transformational Policy Leadership Award*- Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
- ◆ *Citizen Advocacy Award*- Sherbie Worthen
- ◆ *Scholar Advocate Award*- John L. Pottenger, Jr.
- ◆ *Connecticut Voices for Children Founders' Award*- Ellen Scalettar

2005

- ◆ *Legislative Leadership Award*- Senate President Pro Tempore Donald E. Williams, Jr.
- ◆ *Transformational Philanthropy Award*- Melville Charitable Trust
- ◆ *Media Award*- Michele Jacklin
- ◆ *Connecticut Voices for Children Founders' Award*- Dr. Janice Gruendel
- ◆ *Albert J. Solnit Leadership Award*- Dr. Roslyn Meyer

2004

- ◆ *Albert J. Solnit Leadership Award*- U.S. Senator Christopher Dodd
- ◆ *Legislative Leadership Award*- State Representative Toni Walker
- ◆ *Public Service Award*- George Coleman, Associate Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Education
- ◆ *Transformational Philanthropy Award*- William Casper Graustein Memorial Fund
- ◆ *Citizen Advocacy Awards*- Courtney and Jane Bourns
- ◆ *Connecticut Voices for Children Founders' Award*- Judith Solomon

2002

- ◆ *Albert J. Solnit Leadership Award*- State Representative Christel Truglia
- ◆ *Lifetime Achievement Award*- Professor Edward Zigler, Yale University
- ◆ *Statewide Child Advocacy Award*- Jeanne Milstein and the Office of the Child Advocate
- ◆ *Media Award*- Ann Nyberg, Channel 8 News Anchor
- ◆ *Citizen Advocacy Award*- Harry Orlick
- ◆ *Community Advocacy Award*- Dr. Eric Cooper, President, National Urban Alliance for Effective Education
- ◆ *Youth Mentor Award*- Alan MacKenzie, Director, Our Piece of the Pie

2001

- ◆ *Albert J. Solnit Leadership Award*- State Senator Kevin B. Sullivan
- ◆ *Media Awards*- The Hartford Courant's Dave Altimari, Dwight Blint, Susan Campbell, Beth Hamilton, Andrew Julien, Kathy Megan, Daryl Perch, Colin Poitras, and Eric Weiss
- ◆ *Citizen Advocacy Award*- Sheila Amdur
- ◆ *Community Advocacy Awards*- Rev. Bonita Grubbs and Marilyn Ondrasik
- ◆ *Youth Mentor Awards*- Michael Duggan, Will MacAdams, and Richard Sugarman

2000

- ◆ *Policy Leadership Award*- Lt. Governor M. Jodi Rell
- ◆ *Albert J. Solnit Leadership Award*- State Senator Toni Harp
- ◆ *Community Advocacy Award*- Fernando Betancourt
- ◆ *Citizen Advocacy Awards*- Eva Bunnell and Norma Schatz
- ◆ *Vision to Action Awards*- Paula Armbruster, Anne Calabresi, Henry Fernandez, III, Matthew Klein, Roslyn Meyer, and Jerome Meyer, Founders of LEAP—Leadership, Education, and Athletics in Partnership, Inc.
- ◆ *Connecticut Voices for Children Founders' Award*- Priscilla “Penny” Canny

1999

- ◆ *A Special Tribute To* Albert J. Solnit, MD
- ◆ *Albert J. Solnit Leadership Award*- State Representative John Thompson
- ◆ *Volunteerism Awards*- Barbara Colley and Rev. Gary Smith, Camp Totokett
- ◆ *Citizen Advocacy Awards*- Marva and Willie Jones, Grandparents
- ◆ *Media Award*- Stephen Winters, *Connecticut Post*

Note: There was no First for Kids award program held in 2003, 2007 or 2010.

Connecticut Voices for Children Board

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Board Chair
Yale Child Study Center



Barbara Fernandez
CT Department of
Economic and
Community Development



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Connecticut
Bar Foundation



Hector Glynn
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Mary Ann Handley
Retired State Senator



Lynn Cochran
Greater Hartford
Legal Aid, Inc.

Allyx Schiavone
Friends Center for Children

Note: Organization affiliations listed for identification purposes only.



Meet our new Executive Director: Ellen Shemitz

Ellen J. Shemitz joins Connecticut Voices for Children with over 25 years of public and private sector experience advancing social and civil justice through research, policy analysis, advocacy, litigation and public engagement. A Connecticut native who received both her B.A. (1983) and J.D. (1987) from Yale University, Ellen joins us from New Hampshire where she advocated for children since first moving north to serve as a Law Clerk for the Honorable Hugh H. Bownes (US Court of Appeals for the First Circuit).

A respected litigator who helped break new ground in the law of special education, Ms. Shemitz led Connecticut Voices' sister organization, the Children's Alliance of New Hampshire, from 1999 through 2007. As President of the Children's Alliance, Ellen founded the New Hampshire Child Advocacy Network, a collaborative association of more than 200 child-serving organizations responsible for setting and advancing a multi-issue legislative agenda, earned the Outstanding Advocate Award from the National Association of School Psychologists (2003) and chaired the National Kids Count Steering Committee of the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2006-2007). Most recently, Ms. Shemitz served as Executive Director of the New Hampshire Association for Justice, leading the professional association during a time when budget constraints posed significant challenges to the accessibility and accountability of the civil justice system.

Connecticut Voices for Children Staff

Ellen Shemitz, J.D.	Executive Director
Robert Cotto, Jr. M.Ed., M.A.	Senior Policy Fellow
Linda Deemy	Project and Development Associate
Kenneth Feder	Policy Fellow
Shelley Geballe, J.D., M.P.H.	Distinguished Senior Fellow
Wade Gibson, J.D.	Senior Policy Fellow
Mary Jennings	Office Manager
Eddie Joseph	Policy Fellow
Sharon Langer, M.Ed., J.D.	Senior Policy Fellow
Mary Alice Lee, Ph.D.	Senior Policy Fellow
Claire Morduch, M.P.P.M.	Director of Finance and Administration
Cyd Oppenheimer, J.D.	Senior Policy Fellow
Orlando Rodriguez, M.A.	Senior Policy Fellow
Matthew Santacroce	Policy Analyst
Michael Sullivan, M.S.W.	Director of Communications
Emily Walker	Work-Study Student

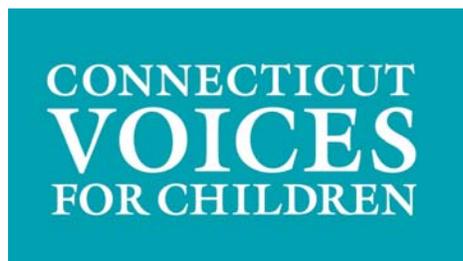
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the lives of Connecticut's children*



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