

President's Message

Hear Their Voices

By Alan G. Brackett, 2022-23 President

Jay, a 2nd-grade student, has been in a mental health facility three times in less than two months. He attends the neighborhood elementary school and received seven school referrals, seven days of suspensions and was about to be expelled. His mom contacted the T.E.A.M.S. (Training, Education and Mediation for Students) office to be able to participate in the expulsion meeting via Zoom. During the meeting, it was agreed that Jay would be placed at another school for behavior support. T.E.A.M.S. and the parent agreed to placement without filing a formal complaint against the parish if they agreed to provide an interim Individual Education Plan while they conducted the evaluation. T.E.A.M.S. and the parent were prepared to file a formal complaint to the state because the parish failed to identify this child under Child Find law based on his history from the previous school year. Two weeks later, in his new school with behavior support, Jay has been successful and is a happy thriving student.

Michael's school day started like any other. He had breakfast with his family, walked his usual route to school, while wearing the special shirt he was given for making the honor roll again. A couple of hours into the school day, the police arrived at his classroom claiming Michael committed an armed robbery earlier that morning. He was handcuffed in front of his classmates and taken to jail. His tears and pleas of innocence were ignored. He spent the night in a cell alone and afraid. The Louisiana Center for Children's Rights (LCCR) team sent out investigators to canvass the neighborhood where the crime occurred to find out what happened. They found that: 1) several witnesses said the suspect wore a plain black t-shirt. Michael's shirt was bright blue, with big yellow letters saying, Honor Roll; 2) the crime happened a full 15 minutes after Michael arrived

at school that morning; 3) Michael's arrest hinged on a single witness who said she thought she saw Michael in the area of the crime. Michael's LCCR team presented its findings before a juvenile court judge, who immediately dismissed the case and released Michael home to his family. Michael is happy to have this ordeal behind him, but the trauma he experienced left him feeling unsafe and vulnerable. LCCR also connected him with a therapist to help.

Jay and Michael, like many of our children, are considered the most vulnerable members of our society. As a result of the pandemic, plunging economy, multiple natural disasters and many other factors, more and more children are living in poverty and more and more children are experiencing abuse, abandonment or neglect.

The Louisiana Bar Foundation (LBF) works hard to support organizations that provide children with a voice. The LBF provides funding to organizations providing direct legal representation of children, in matters ranging from delinquency to access to special education, mental health and foster care services; organizations engaging in impact litigation and/or systemic legal reform efforts on behalf of children; organizations that provide lay advocacy for children in legal proceedings; and organizations that assist with the administration of justice with respect to children.

This year, the LBF granted more than \$2.6 million to Louisiana programs that provide free legal assistance to needy children. I am proud to say that the LBF is dedicated to making sure that every



Alan G. Brackett

CINC Outcomes for 2020-2021

The 2020-2021 Child in Need of Care (CINC) outcomes are based upon quarterly LSC reporting:

- ▶ Number of Louisiana judicial districts served: 34.
- ▶ Number of Louisiana courts served: 64 (includes city courts).
- ▶ Number of Children in Need of Care served: 4,401 (prior FY year: 4,008).
- ▶ Total number of court appearances: 13,201.
- ▶ Total number of child client visits: 1,693.
- ▶ Total number of staffing attended: 1,810.
- ▶ Percentage of Children in Need of Care represented in courts served: 100%.
- ▶ Percentage of children's attorneys meeting child attorney qualification standards: 100%.

child's voice is heard.

"Not only are we a voice in the school systems but also in the community. We link families to other support and resources that they may not be aware of. As an advocate and parent, I truly fear what will happen if there is no one left to help be their voice. Training, educating and empowering through knowledge is very important," said Cassie Hubble, director and advocate for T.E.A.M.S.

As a Fellow, you are instrumental in providing legal assistance to the underprivileged and disadvantaged members of our community. On behalf of our children, who cannot help themselves, we truly thank our contributing Fellows.

If you would like to become a Fellow and support the LBF and support all of our grantees, contact the Foundation at (504)561-1046. To make a donation to the LBF or to review a list of our grantees, go to www.raisingthebar.org.