

Relatives Caring for Foster Children Receive Support after Years of Struggle

Juvenile Rights Project and many others had tried, but failed, to change Oregon's law which treated foster parents who were related to the children in their care as second-class citizens. JRP finally succeeded in correcting this injustice in 2007 with the passage of SB 282.

Under the new legislation, which went into effect January 1, 2008, Oregon joined 48 other states who treat relatives the same as foster parents who are not related to the children in their care. Relative foster parents began receiving the same support payments to cover the basic living needs of the children in their care that other foster parents have received for decades.

SB 282 was drafted and promoted by JRP in the 2007 Legislative Session. A group of four legislators, Senators Kate Brown and Jeff Kruse, and Representatives Wayne Krieger and Mike Schaufler, adopted SB 282 as part of their package of child welfare reform bills.

JRP presented voluminous testimony and research to state legislators which demonstrate the

clear advantages of relative foster care. Children who are placed with their family :

- Spend less time in foster care;
- Are reunified with parents or adopted more often and more successfully; and
- Experience far greater stability (less movement from foster home to foster home), which results in fewer emotional and behavioral problems.



On any given day, 25% - 30% of the children in Oregon's foster care system are living with their grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other relatives who are responsible for their daily care and safety.

While the benefits of placing foster children with their relatives have been known for some time, it took two decades to give relative foster parents and the children in their care the recognition and support they deserve.

JRP continued to fight to end the discrimination against relative foster parents because we witnessed, year in and year out, the tremendous benefits to the children we serve when they are placed with caring aunts, uncles, grandparents and older siblings. And we were aggrieved to see the number of times when one of these family members had to make the terrible choice to let their family members move from one foster home after another
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CONTRIBUTING TO JRP IS NOW MORE CONVENIENT

Individual and business contributions support the SchoolWorks and HelpLine programs, as well as our Legislative advocacy. JRP has signed-up with **JustGive.Org** to give JRP supporters a convenient way to make one-time or recurring donations on-line. Just go to the JRP web site (www.jrplaw.org) and click on the **DONATE** button to make a one-time donation or set up regular donations to support JRP programs throughout the year.



Message from the Executive Director

After nine years as a social worker and advocate at the Juvenile Rights Project, I was asked to step in as the Interim Executive Director in March. It is a tremendous honor and no small responsibility to head an organization that has such a profound impact on behalf of Oregon's most vulnerable children.

I came to JRP in 1999 after working in various programs that serve children and families in Washington and Oregon. I was frustrated, frankly, by the limited impact I could have working through traditional social service systems.

"I support JRP because vulnerable children need fierce advocacy. JRP's tireless efforts positively and profoundly impact the lives of kids."

**—Emily Shannon,
JRP Board
Secretary**

I first became aware of JRP because of the class-wide advocacy they had done on behalf of foster children in Oregon. Since 1995, tens of thousands of children and their families have benefited from the additional resources that JRP's advocacy has brought to the child welfare system, including flexible funds which meet a wide array of child and family needs and

which promote family preservation.

A number of my clients at the time were in the child welfare system. It was an employee of the Department of Human Services who first suggested I contact JRP because it is an organization that is equally effective in serving individual children and as it is at changing the systems that serve children so that their needs are better met.

As I learned more about JRP, I knew I wanted to be a part.

JRP has been at the forefront of one innovation after another — from reducing the number of children with mental illnesses being kept in hospitals or other institutions to preventing foster children from having to change schools unnecessarily. JRP's work on behalf of Oregon's children has served as a model for advocacy on behalf of children in other states, as well.

As much as JRP has accomplished, the need to fight for vulnerable children and families continues. I thank all of you who have supported JRP in the past, and hope you will continue to support JRP in fighting the good fight now and in the future.

Warmest Regards,
Mark McKechnie

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because the family who cared about them could not afford the additional expense to rent

a larger home or provide for the food, clothing, child care and other costs of caring for these children without help from the state.

It took nearly 20 years to change Oregon's policy. In 1989, Juvenile Rights Project attorney Angela Sherbo filed a challenge to the Oregon law that denied medical and financial support to her client, Sheri Lipscomb, a child with disabilities placed in the care of her aunt and uncle.

The U.S. District Court ruled that the statute was Constitutional. Children's advocates had a brief victory when attorneys Emily Simon

and Mark Kramer won a reversal in the U.S. Court of Appeals of the 9th Circuit. Victory was short-lived, however, when the 9th Circuit reconsidered and reinstated the law. The Court found that it was the job of the Oregon Legislature to decide whether or not to allocate the resources necessary to provide care for foster children living with relatives.



Finally, in 2007, the Governor and the Oregon Legislature decided by unanimous consent that it was time to recognize the important role relative foster parents play and provide them the support they need to care for children who are wards of the state. The language that treated relatives as different (and, therefore, less than) other foster parents was removed from Oregon law.

SchoolWorks Assists 1,500 Students in Six Years

JRP assisted 23 students who were struggling in school in 2001. The following year, JRP was awarded a four-year federal grant to create the SchoolWorks program. By the time the 2007-08 school year ended, SchoolWorks had served more than 1,500 children.

SchoolWorks focuses JRP's legal and social work expertise to promote school success for students who are involved in the juvenile court system, including children in foster care and youth charged with delinquent offenses.

These students historically experience school failure, school transfers, expulsion, and dropout at far higher rates than other students. SchoolWorks is designed and dedicated to keep the most at-risk students in school where they can be successful. SchoolWorks commits the extra time and attention to these students to ensure that their special needs are met.

SchoolWorks serves students like Jimmy, a boy in foster care who has a high IQ and qualified for the Talented and Gifted Program, but was stuck working at a computer most of the day in a behavior classroom because of his mental health and behavioral issues. SchoolWorks was able to convince his school that the lack of academic challenge and failure to recognize his need to interact with students and teachers was only serving to reinforce and perpetuate his behavioral problems. At SchoolWorks' urging, the school has developed a plan that recognizes and nurtures his academic



talents, while providing appropriate supports for his behavioral and emotional needs.

Another student, Martin, lived in 17 different placements during his first six months in foster care. Doctors suspect that he was exposed to alcohol *in utero* and is developmentally disabled. He relies on a consistent routine in his life. He was confused and upset when he was not allowed to go to his locker at the end of the school day and his routine was disrupted. His high school moved to expel him under the district's "zero

tolerance" policy for leaving school. Because Martin's SchoolWorks attorney was able to use the protections available to disabled students under federal law and show that the incident was a result of his special needs, Martin was able to stay in school, and the staff there developed additional strategies for communicating more effectively with him and in maintaining the structure that supported his successful participation in school.

JRP's SchoolWorks program continues to serve more than 325 students each year with the support of foundations like the Bill and Melinda Gates and Collins Foundations and from the generosity of numerous individual and corporate donors.

JRP Endorses Portland Children's Levy Renewal

The Board and staff of the Juvenile Rights Project thank the residents of the City of Portland for passing the Children's Levy in 2002 and urge a yes vote on Measure 26-94 to renew it in November.

Funds from the levy have served over 16,000 children in the city of Portland over the last six years. JRP's clients have directly benefited from proven programs that protect children from abuse and improve

their school performance and emotional well-being. JRP's SchoolWorks program received \$325,000 in matching funds from the Portland Children's Investment Fund in 2006-2008.

Please consider taking some time to get involved, and encourage your family, friends, and neighbors to support the Children's Levy. Go to: <http://www.childrenslevy.com/get-involved.html>

"I support JRP because I am committed to meeting the educational and care needs of children and families in our community. I take pride and comfort in knowing that the dedicated team at JRP are supporting these same needs, ensuring that children and families know their rights and will provide a voice when no one else will."

—Karen Sheean, Vice President, Knowledge Learning Corp. and JRP Board Vice President



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Juvenile Rights Project, Inc. is an Oregon non-profit corporation founded for the purpose of providing high quality legal services to children and families, without the means to retain counsel, through individual representation in juvenile proceedings, and through class-wide advocacy in the courts and legislature.

We're on the web:
[Http://www.jrplaw.org](http://www.jrplaw.org)