

KidsFirst

making children's voices heard

ANNUAL REPORT
2020



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Sketch of Jenny by teen artist



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

You bring hope to children caught in conflict. Throughout the pandemic, a child's Kids First attorney has often been the only adult meeting with them in person to assess their well-being and connect them with needed resources. Parents have been under more stress too, which exacerbates conflict. Children continue to have instability from increased substance abuse, child abuse, mental illness, and domestic violence but Kids First is there to offer advocacy and hope – thanks to you.

We learned so much in the past pandemic year:

- Many parents prefer co-parenting sessions with their ex on Zoom rather than in person.
- Parents take turns talking on Zoom (and there's a mute button when needed!).
- Zoom let us expand the geographic reach of our joint parenting sessions.
- We miss taking child clients to get ice cream but are grateful for parks.
- Kids are much better at wearing masks than adults.
- You are the BEST. You even showed up for a virtual Happy Hour.
- 15 years of serving kids has flown by!

Thank you for ensuring we can be there for kids through thick and thin. You have given us hope. You have given kids so much more.

Jenny Schuler
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

YOU HELPED KIDS FIRST GROW



Christine Boyer, JD



Allison Heffern, JD



Negebe Sheronick



Sarah van Deest

Your generous support has allowed Kids First to expand. We welcomed four new members to our 12-member team: attorneys Christine Boyer and Allison Heffern; restorative justice facilitator Negebe Sheronick; and development director Sarah van Deest.

Attorney Christine Boyer was previously in private practice in Johnson County, focusing on criminal, family and child welfare cases.

Attorney Allison Heffern has practiced family law in Cedar Rapids for more than 30 years. Allison is a trained mediator and collaborative lawyer.

Peace Facilitator Negebe Sheronick brings over 30 years of experience teaching children in the Cedar Rapids area; she's equipped to help elementary students resolve conflict.

Development Director Sarah van Deest is a Cedar Rapids native with strong community relationships who has built a career as an organizer and nonprofit advocate.

EXCITING NEXT STEPS FOR KIDS FIRST DES MOINES


The Des Moines office of Kids First launched as its own nonprofit on July 1: the Iowa Center for Children's Justice. We are proud to have started our child representation program and divorce workshops for kids in Des Moines. We are equally proud to hand it off to an established and talented team. We continue to partner with our former coworkers in weekly case staffing meetings, in presentations to judges and lawyers at conferences, and on statewide initiatives. Both nonprofits have the autonomy and flexibility to focus on the unique needs of children in our own communities – and to innovate solutions as needs evolve. Children benefit from the energy and commitment local ownership inspires. We cheer on ICCJ as they establish and grow their own agency.

The heartwarming illustrations in this annual report were drawn by Kids First attorney Elizabeth Weyer Davis. Elizabeth perfectly captures the spirit of our clients and their stories. Thank you, Elizabeth, for sharing your many talents with us!



YOU GAVE KAYLA A VOICE

You know a custody case affects the child more than anyone else. Thank you for believing they deserve an advocate. Kayla's story helps paint a picture of how you are helping kids through their parents' conflict with an attorney to represent them.

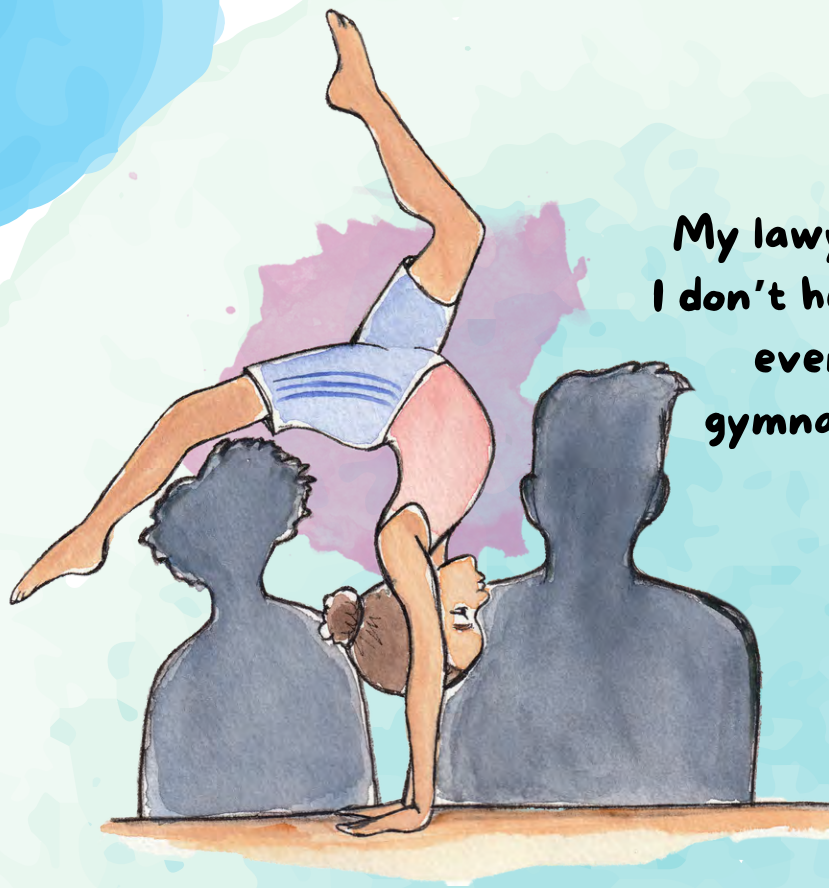

I'm Kayla. My mom and dad
fight ALL the time. My mom
yelled at my dad,
"Kayla doesn't want to come
to your house!"
It makes me really sad.



I love my mom and my dad. But
I really, really miss my dog Lily
when I'm at my dad's. His
landlord doesn't allow dogs.

Now I have my own lawyer. She's
super nice and we go get ice cream.
I can tell her anything—even about
my mom and dad fighting and how
much I miss Lily. She really listens.





My lawyer talked to my parents and I don't hear them argue anymore. They even sat by each other at my gymnastics meet! They both gave me a hug afterwards.

My dad worked it out with his landlord so Lily can come to his apartment! My lawyer told the judge how I feel and now I get to spend time with both my parents equally.



My lawyer listened to me and made things way better in my family. Lily likes my lawyer too!



YOU HELPED KIDS THROUGH CONFLICT

2020 BY THE NUMBERS

1,264 CHILDREN & FAMILIES SERVED



95%

OF ORDERS
REFLECTED THE
KIDS' WISHES
FOR SAFETY &
STABILITY

607

STUDENTS
SERVED
IN RESTORATIVE
JUSTICE
SCHOOL-BASED
PROGRAM



86%

OF CASES
SETTLED
WITHOUT
A TRIAL



*NATIONALLY, ONLY 15% OF
HIGH-CONFLICT CUSTODY CASES
SETTLE WITHOUT A TRIAL

162

PARENTS
PARTICIPATED IN
MEDIATION



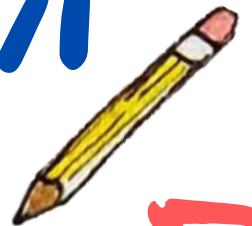
98%

OF CIRCLES
ENDED
IN AGREEMENT



\$766,071

ANNUAL EXPENSES
FOR 12 STAFF AND
5 PROGRAMS



Kids First attorney Elizabeth Weyer Davis illustrated "50 Ways to Relax" for our divorce workshops. When the pandemic began, we shared this with kids to help them relax and manage emotions.





Take a bath

Listen to music

Take a nap

Read a book

Sit in nature

Play With a fidget toy

Take deep breaths

Watch silly videos

eat a healthy snack

Go for a run

Think of three positive things about yourself

count backwards
100... 99...
98... 97...
96... 95...
from one hundred

Go to a park

Do Yoga

practice forgiveness

Be Kind

Write a letter to someone you love

Journal

Paint or draw

Pet a furry creature

Talk with someone you trust

Go for a bike ride

Build a blanket fort

meditate

Look for shapes in the clouds

50 Ways to Relax

Visualize a peaceful place

Drink water

Get crafty

Create a Calm down jar

Play a sport

Eat outside

Ask for a hug

Watch your favorite movie

Turn off electronics

Jump rope

Play a board game

Bake something yummy

Write a poem or song lyrics

Take silly selfies

Laugh with a friend

smell a relaxing scent

Go to bed early

Tidy your space

Ask for help

Go fishing

Do a face mask

Think of five things you are grateful for

It's Okay to cry

Say your feelings out loud

DANCE!

HELP

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YOU HELPED ZACH AT SCHOOL

Kids experience conflict in their families but also with friends. You helped Zach restore his friendship with David after participating in a circle together. Kids First's school-based staff use restorative justice to resolve conflict and prevent youth violence. You are helping students get back to class faster after a conflict so they can stay in school.



I got in a fight with a kid named David and was suspended for **THREE** days. When I came back to school, we still had problems and were going to fight again. My teacher talked with us but that didn't really help. It was just my word against his. I was mad! I walked out to go home.

I saw Miss Judy in the hallway. Talking with her made me remember David and I used to be friends. I started to feel bad about the fight. I wanted to know how David felt.




David agreed to meet with me in a circle with Miss Judy. In the circle, I heard his side. I listened when he had the talking piece.



Hearing David helped me understand where he was coming from and why he did it. I felt bad. I told him my anger got the best of me. He said sorry too. We agreed fighting wasn't worth it. Miss Judy asked what else we need to make things right. David asked, "Give each other a hug?"



I went back to class and didn't miss any assignments. The next week Miss Judy asked me how we're doing. I said we're cool. It feels good knowing we don't have a problem anymore.



You helped Kids First's restorative justice work grow to serve five schools in Cedar Rapids: Hoover, Johnson, Erskine, and Grant Wood elementary schools and McKinley middle school. You are giving kids important conflict-resolution skills that will serve them even in adulthood.

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A MAGNIFICENT LEGACY

Diane Daubenmier had a front row seat when Kids First opened in 2005 in a borrowed office at Waypoint where Diane was the CFO. For many years, Diane and her late husband Jim have been generous supporters.

"Working at Waypoint, I came to really see how a nonprofit functions and what's most important. It's the people," Diane said. "Jim and I were always struck by Jenny's authenticity and that of Kids First. And Jenny took an idea no one else had and made it a success."

Jim lifted others with his encouragement and kindness. He cared and advocated for those needing an extra hand, always ready to lend his. Before his death in December 2020, Jim privately added Kids First to his estate plan. We are honored and humbled to be part of Jim and Diane's magnificent legacy.

"I believe children who have received help from Kids First have a stronger sense of their inherent dignity and voice," said Diane. "That's why Jim and I gave to Kids First."



Diane and Jim Daubenmier

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WHAT KIDS HAVE TO SAY

**"I really enjoyed sharing my thoughts
and that we came up with a solution."**
— Middle School Student

**"She helped explain things I did not
understand."**
— Child client (boy, 13)

"She listened and gave good advice."
— Child client (girl, 16)

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Teresa Stenstrup & Jake Nelson
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Mike & Gloria Tilson**
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Mary Van Houten
[Marcie Watson**](#)
[Pat Weir](#)
Tom & Jane Wells**
Kendra & Maddie Weston
John W. Weyer
Vera Weyer
Darby Winger
Erica Yoder
Nicholas Zammuto

Endowment

Les & Katrina Garner
Darla & Randy Parks

In Honor of:

In honor of Christine Boyer
by Anonymous
In honor of Jane Burstain
by Todd & Jennifer Burstain
In honor of Mike & Cindy Dunn
by Ruthie & Nate Dunn
In honor of Nate Dunn and
F&M Bank for Derecho clean-up
by Bryce & Michelle Nemitz

In honor of Laura Ebinger
by Kate & Aden Beihl
by Mary Jane Brandes
by Matt & Jeanne Brandes
by Susan & Julian Carlo
In honor of families in need
By Tamara & Jim Borland
In honor of Don & Carol Fejar
by Jane Oglesby
In honor of Judy Goldberg
by Susan & Mark Abernathy
by Bridget & Dave Castelluccio
by Shelly & Jerry Goldman
In honor of Judy Goldberg, Negebe
Sheronick & LaToya Harrington
By Liz Jacobi & Terry Bergen
In honor of Judge Patrick Grady
by Hon. Marsha Bergen
by Karen Volz & Lance Heeren
In honor of Judy Grove
by Douglas Anderson
In honor of Lillian Janzam
by Brian & Karen Middleswarth
In honor of Donald L. Johnson
by Byron Scott &
Linnea Johnson-Scott
In honor of Kids First Staff
by Donna & Randy Kasch
by Laura Martin
by Libby Slappey
In honor of Laura Martin
by Elaine Fox
By Rich & Kay Mitchell
In honor of Leo and Willa Olson
by Sarah Halbrook &
Bill Prowell
In honor of Jenny Schulz
by Scott Corporon &
Josie Porras Corporon
by Leigh Goodmark &
Doug Nierle

by Peter & Margaret Johnson
by Tim & Jan Johnson
by Rich & Marion Patterson
by Tom & Nancy Pugh
by Scott Schenkelberg &
Susan Gillespie
by Jason Zabokrtsky
In honor of Negebe Sheronick
by Marilyn Lodge
by Christy Scheidt
In honor of Erik Sittig
by Tom & Jane Wells
In honor of Libby Slappey
by Patti & Kyle Kunz
by Hilery Livengood &
Ben Fashimpaur
In honor of Libby Slappey &
Charles Crawley
by Sue Heeren
In honor of Mindy Sorg
by Jennifer Neumann
In honor of Issabell St. Charles
by Stephanie Cohen
by Sjonna Paulson
by Sarah Shuss
In honor of Melanie K. Stahlberg
by Marlene & Kim Johnson
In honor of all teachers
by Mike & Gloria Tilson
In honor of Sarah van Deest
by Kate & Marty Pick
In honor of Stacey Warren
by Tiffany Vasey
In honor of Nicholas Zammuto
by Rachel Buenaobra
by Susan Dégallier
by Carly Grace
by Andrea Friedl
by Kelly Lindell
by Maxwell Maharry
by Diane Zammuto

by Vincent Zammuto

In Memory of:

In memory of Lenora DeWall
by Norma Hohensee
In memory of Robert Fletcher
by Marjorie Fletcher
In memory of Darold Godfrey
by Luis & Jodi Castillo
by Jan Godfrey
In memory of Allan Harms
by Sally Harms
In memory of Bev Heuton
by Jack Heuton
In memory of Douglas Johnson
by Anonymous
by Steven & Ann Burns
by Steven Ford
by Mark & Kathy Golly
by Klaus & Janet Hanson
by Vicki Hughes
by Judy Johnson
by Donna & Randy Kasch
by Dan & Nova Kolander
by Steven & Sheryl Kruse
by Dick & Avona Lehmann
by Pat & Kim Marshall
by Barb & Thomas Morris
by Lon & Kristen Olejniczak
by Kimmit & Judith Renken
by Joan & Richard Rust
by Jenny Schulz & John Chaimov
by Mary Van Houten
by Marcie Watson
by Michael Zander
In memory of Doug & Anita Johnson
by Catherine Broughton
In memory of Elizabeth Klein
by Norma Hohensee
In memory of Robert L. Kocher
by Joan F. Kocher
In memory of Aaron Kolander
by Dick & Avona Lehmann
In memory of Anne Lavery
by John Lavery
by James & Joan Mosel
In memory of Butch &
Jarrod Magnuson
by Tonya Peters & Miles Rugh
In memory of Anna Mayer
by Jack Mayer
In memory of Luella Meyer
by Diane Pierson
In memory of Margaret Sprague
by Richard & Donna Sprague
In memory of Wally Sundet
by Dick & Avona Lehmann
In memory of Paula van Deest
by Sue & Kirk Plagge
In memory of John S. Wasson
by Alice Wasson



2020

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Tyler Wills

Dear Ms. Negebe
THANK YOU FOR BEING NICE
TO ME.
I LIKE THAT YOU LISTEN
TO ME WHEN I'M TALKING.
YOU ARE A NICE TEACHER.
THANK YOU FOR STOPPING
ME FROM GETTING IN TROUBLE

SINCERELY

H

Kids First Peace Facilitator, Negebe Sheronick, received this note of appreciation from an elementary school student, "Hugo," after he participated in a circle with other students. Hugo had a quick sense of humor and was good at making people laugh. But after he listened to other students in a circle, he realized things that sounded funny at the time had made his classmates sad. Hugo didn't want to keep hurting people's feelings, so he apologized and stopped making hurtful jokes.



Chef and Cobble Hill Co-Owner Andy Schumacher and Casey Hall transported us to the Caribbean for Happy Hour at Home. Thanks to everyone who joined virtually for an evening of tropical-inspired cocktails and fun.