



**ANNUAL
REPORT
2022**

KidsFirst
making children's voices heard

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Client selfie with Jenny

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Together we achieved much in 2022 to pave a path into the future. Here are just a few accomplishments:

- adding 3 gifted peace facilitators—to total 7 facilitators serving 10 schools;
- holding webinars for therapists who may otherwise have been hesitant to work with families in litigation so kids can receive needed help;
- hosting the first annual “14 Under 14” awards to recognize our current & future leaders.

When I launched Kids First in 2005, I could not have imagined the future of this organization. And today, even with a vision for the future, I know I cannot conceive of what is to come. What I do know is: the future is brighter for children thanks to you.


EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

THE FUTURE IS PROGRESS

2022 was a year of incredible growth. You helped Kids First's team grow to 17 and our school-based restorative justice program expand to 10 Cedar Rapids schools.



**Alexandra
VanDooren**

A former elementary school teacher, Alexandra serves as a Peace Facilitator at Arthur elementary school.



**John
Blackcloud**

A former Juvenile Court Liason and experienced behavior specialist, John is a Peace Facilitator at Roosevelt middle school.



**Dan
Anderson**

Dan left the practice of law to support Kids First's mission. He coordinates with the Executive Director to assist with day-to-day operations at Kids First.



**Angel
Ramirez**

An experienced community organizer in equity and education, Angel works as a Peace Facilitator at Metro alternative high school and McKinley middle school.



Scan this QR code to watch KCRG's news story on Kids First's restorative justice program expansion.





Terry
Age 12, Wilson
Future Teacher



Mayte
Age 11, Van Buren
Future Lawyer



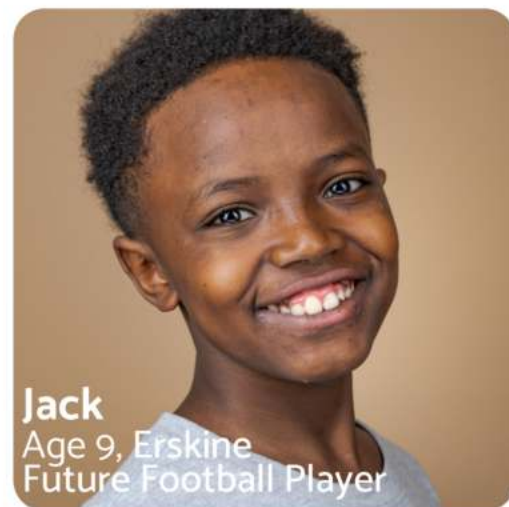
Kaycee
Age 12, Franklin
Future Children's Therapist



Korbin
Age 13, McKinley
Future Forensic Scientist



Carver
Age 7, Cleveland
Future Teacher



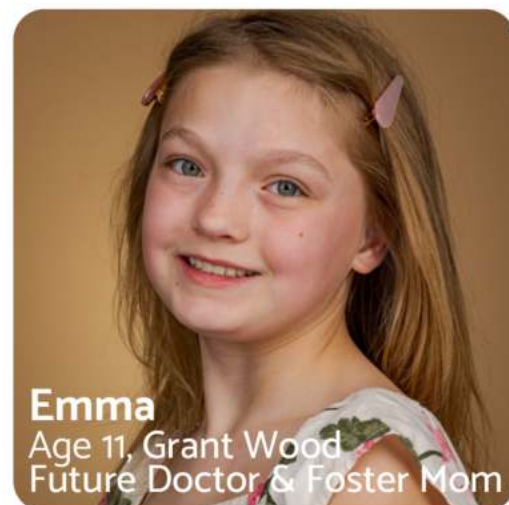
Jack
Age 9, Erskine
Future Football Player



Jaela
Age 13, Taft
Future Artist



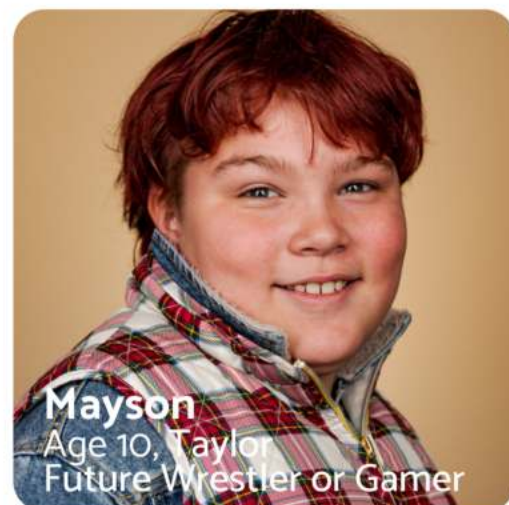
Essance
Age 10, Harrison
Future Graphic Designer



Emma
Age 11, Grant Wood
Future Doctor & Foster Mom



Ava
Age 13, Roosevelt
Future Psychologist



Mayson
Age 10, Taylor
Future Wrestler or Gamer

THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT



Raven

Age 11, Johnson
Future Designer



Prosper

Age 13, Wilson
Future Engineer



Dafne

Age 8, Hoover
Future Doctor or Teacher

Kids First Law Center launched a new event to give voice to the contributions of youth—the 14 Under 14 Awards. Cedar Rapids teachers nominated students who create positive change and inspire others. Honorees exemplified positive leadership qualities like good citizenship, problem-solving, empathy, kindness, and perseverance.

“As a children’s organization, we wanted to highlight the contributions of young people. And mission accomplished—I’ve been blown away by these incredible kids,” said Kids First Director Jenny Schulz.

Fourteen honorees under age 14 were recognized at the awards ceremony in front of family members, teachers, friends, and community members. Teachers and Mayor Tiffany O’Donnell gave kids their awards, which included a medal and a framed photograph of them taken by Bruce Thayer. Kirkwood Community College made a surprise announcement, awarding a \$500 scholarship to each honoree. Afterwards, families and community members congratulated the honorees at a cookie reception.

The 14 Under 14 awards will be an annual celebration. Schulz says, “It is the feel-good event of the year.”

These young leaders give us hope for the future.



Peace Facilitator
John Blackcloud (center)
pictured with two students
at Roosevelt middle school
in Cedar Rapids. (Photo
credit: *The Gazette*)

SUPPORTING TEACHERS WHO BUILD OUR FUTURE

Kids First's peace project in the schools helps students resolve conflict and develop skills for the future workplace: social awareness, problem-solving, collaboration, and positive relationships.

In 2022, Kids First's seven peace facilitators served over 2,300 students in 10 Cedar Rapids schools. Your support led to 2,382 restorative circles to prevent and respond to conflict. Peacemaking has a ripple effect and creates a safer school environment where everyone can focus on learning. This project also reduces teacher burnout and retains quality educators.

Kids First invites teachers to complete an anonymous survey every fall and spring. Here are just a few of the 150+ positive comments received from teachers, school counselors, and principals.

Kids First has made a huge difference in our school and I take advantage of your help and expertise as often as I can. **It has allowed me to continue teaching** and my class has benefited from your circles.

Elementary School Teacher

Kids First's work has played a **key role in the social emotional learning and support plan at school**. Staff reported ... having the opportunity for students to peacefully work through conflict and repair relationships was a valuable resource and one of the top reasons for reduced number of office referrals.

Elementary Administrator

This is an essential program. I very much appreciate the reliable opportunity for our kids to learn social skills and peacemaking during this emotional time of their lives. **Without this program**, our students wouldn't have a healthy way to work out their conflicts and **we would see more behaviors in the hallways and classrooms**.

Middle School Teacher

Having Kids First in our building has been a huge help and has allowed me to continue with instruction when **I normally would have had to take time away from teaching to deal with student conflicts**.

Elementary Teacher

I really credit circles with improving my relationships with certain students. I have students who frequently have conflict with teachers and feel attacked rather than supported by teachers. **Circles have helped me turn those relationships around**.

Middle School Teacher

A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Amanda had already been suspended once for seven days. She got behind on her schoolwork and returned to a new classroom, impossibly behind in her studies and unsure of where she stood with the other student.

A week later, Amanda was jumped by two girls after school. The next morning she came to school ready to fight, determined to prove she was not weak. Her teacher alerted the Kids First peace facilitator something was wrong. Thanks to the persistence of the peace facilitator who enlisted Amanda's trusted adults' help, Amanda agreed to try a circle (mediation) instead.

Amanda and the other girls used the circle to clear up misunderstandings and find the root causes of their conflict. **The middle school students could clearly picture how their futures might be changed:** "One day when we're grown up, we'll laugh at this. We'll say, 'Just think if we hadn't been able to do volleyball and all the other things we would've missed out on if we fought.'"

THE FUTURE IS COLLABORATIVE

Kids First Helps Therapists Understand Legal System

Over 100 mental health providers from all over Iowa attended a free 3-part webinar series presented by Kids First's therapist/mediator and lawyers. Kids First's mediator shared child-focused practices for providing mental health services to separated families and high-conflict personalities. Kids First lawyers helped therapists understand how working with the legal system and testifying in a custody case benefits a child.

Kids First mediator, Laura Martin, said: "Working with children whose parents are involved in **a court case can be intimidating but mental health services for these children and families are crucial.** Helping providers understand their important role in the legal system may open them to providing services to divorcing families."



Kids First staff Jenny Schulz, Cheri Mase-Reider, Sarah van Deest and Christine Boyer join in celebrating **Laura Martin** (center) as she is honored with a Minnie Rubek Award by the Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation. Laura has singlehandedly run Kids First's joint parenting sessions since 2015. She also connects families with services curated to their specific needs, whether it's a local therapist fluent in a foreign language or a program for a parent with a personality disorder.

LOCAL JUDGES SUPPORT BETTER FUTURES FOR FAMILIES



Judge Nancy Baumgartner (Photo credit: *The Gazette*)

Prior to Kids First, children were sometimes used as a pawn in their parents' divorce. When parents can't get along, Kids First gives the children a voice and someone they can talk to.

Judge David Remley

As a mediator and judge, Bill always sought better ways to resolve conflict—especially when kids were involved. As a product of divorce he knew firsthand the significance of taking kids out of the center of the controversy. And that's what Kids First is all about. Kids First honors Bill's wish to improve the outcomes for children so they don't have to be a part of the conflict.

**Dr. Julianne Thomas in memory of
Judge William Thomas**

The attorneys at Kids First are stellar—they are really good at what they do and make all the difference in the world. During my tenure as a judge, I was always glad when Kids First was involved. The most important part of family law is children's welfare. Just because they are kids doesn't mean they shouldn't be heard—and Kids First gives them a voice.

Judge Nancy Baumgartner

SETTING UP KIDS FOR SUCCESS

Claire was 16 and felt hopeless about her future. Caught in the middle of a fraught custody arrangement with arguing parents under a no-contact order and driving long distances between two warring houses, she didn't have the time, energy, or ability to pursue her own dream – working in healthcare. But her Kids First attorney got the parents talking again. Her Kids First attorney enrolled the family in therapy, settled the custody battle, and now Claire is on her way to becoming a CNA and making her ambition a reality.



20 PAST SUCCESS 22 PREDICTS THE FUTURE

3,008 CHILDREN
& FAMILIES
SERVED

JOINT PARENTING SESSIONS

165

MEDIATIONS

324

PARENTS COACHED

CHILD REPRESENTATION

152

CHILDREN
REPRESENTED

88%

HIGH-CONFLICT
CASES SETTLED
OUTSIDE OF COURT



97%

KIDS REPORTING
LESS PARENTAL
CONFLICT

98%

DECREES
REFLECTING KIDS'
WISHES

YOUTH PEACE PROJECT

2,382

RESTORATIVE CIRCLES
(MEDIATIONS WITH STUDENTS)

97%

GAINED SOCIAL-
EMOTIONAL SKILLS

99%

CIRCLES ENDED
WITH AGREEMENT

\$1

ANNUAL RENT
THANKS TO MERCY!

\$40

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No one cares for "miners" like Kids First, evidenced by this client in a Minecraft costume.

2022

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A child client builds a racetrack and catches up with his attorney.

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Kids First prepares the next generation of attorneys.
 Pictured: University of Iowa College of Law extern Mary Scarpinato.

2022 HONORARIA & MEMORIALS



Kids First upgrades a child client's prospects for life.

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**"I appreciate all you did
and feel very positive
about being on a better
path for our son."**

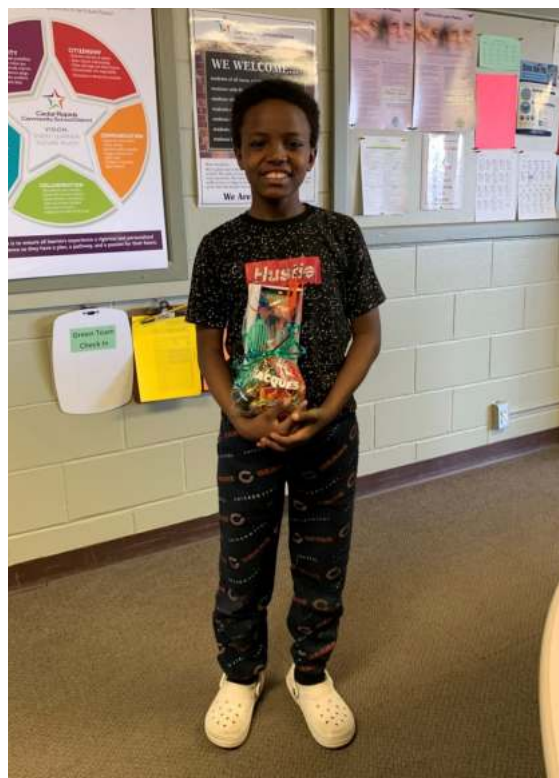
— Client's parent

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by Jan Godfrey
In memory of Allan L. Harms
by Sally Harms
In memory of Lillian Janzam
by Brian & Karen Middleswarth
In memory of Doug & Anita Johnson
by Eric & Anne Johnson
In memory of Anne Lavery
by James & Joan Mosel
by Cheri Whittaker
In memory of Avona Lehmann
by Chad & Kandy Sands
In memory of Joan Nath
by Anonymous
In memory of Don Schmidt
by Colin & Lauren Smith
In memory of Claire J. Sharp
by the Donald L. Johnson Family
In memory of Margaret Sprague
by Dick & Donna Sprague

In memory of Hon. William L. Thomas
by Julianne Thomas
In memory of Paula van Deest
by Sue & Kirk Plagge

In-Kind Donors:

Terry & Johanna Abernathy
Heidi Becker
Jeanne Brandes
Tim Caster
Samuel & Phoebe Charles
The Dunn Family
Brian & Sara Farrell
Riene & Sam Gelman
Shuan & Jess Glick
Kathy Good
Katie Hadjis Gorman
Allison Heffern
John Hughes
Mariah Hurley
Max Johnson
Nikki Kettelkamp
Jennifer Koester
Leslie & Mark Nolte
Amanda Pence
Mark Scheibe
Libby Slappey
Jeff & Pat Swartzendruber
Bruce Thayer
Sarah van Deest
Meghan Zalewski



Jack, a 14 Under 14 honoree recognized for leadership potential, receives his award notification at school.

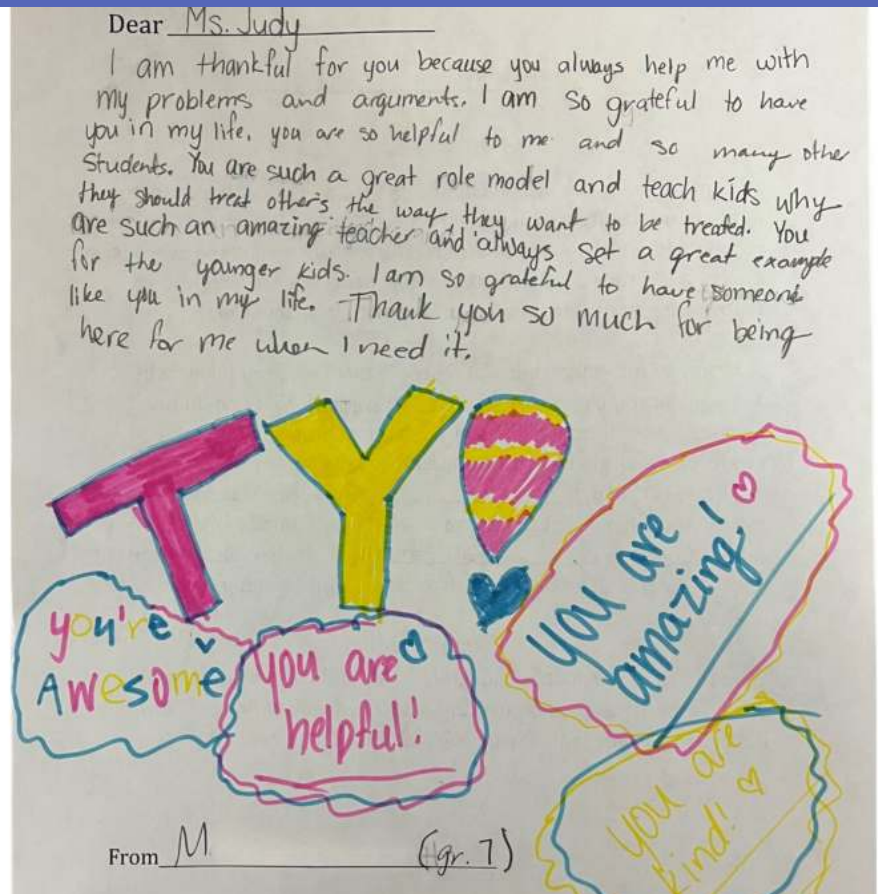
Volunteers:

Scott Bennett
Dave Blankenship
Dorothy de Souza Guedes
Maria Doce
Ruthie Dunn
Shannon Finnegan
Alexandra Harder
LaToya Harrington
Lynn W. Hartman
Katie Jensen

Nikki Kettelkamp
James Klein
Audrey McKinney
Elizabeth Mitchell
Libby Slappey
Vernon Squires
Bruce Thayer
Jamie Reider
Sophie Reider
Nathan Vanderheyden
Jennifer Zahrt

"Thank you for helping me last year. I am now living with my dad which is much safer for me and I just want to say **thank you for having a hand in me getting to get what I want in my life.**"

— "Noah," age 15



We learn to move forward by looking back at the kids we've helped, like this Wilson Middle School 7th grader who wrote a note to Kids First peace facilitator Judy Goldberg.

The Future is Forever

Your gift today builds a brighter tomorrow. Contact Jenny Schulz, jenny@kidsfirstiowa.org or 319-365-5437, to learn more about making a forever gift to Kids First.

BEQUESTS

When you **include Kids First in your estate plan**, you create a future where children are supported in the most difficult time of their lives so they can have a better future. You can use the following assets to fund a bequest: cash, readily marketable securities, or life insurance. You can also **name Kids First as a beneficiary of all or a portion of your IRA**; then neither you and your heirs nor your estate will pay income taxes on the distribution of these assets, nor will Kids First owe taxes on the gift.

IRA CHARITABLE ROLLOVER

Once you reach age 70 1/2, you can **give any amount (up to \$100,000 per IRA owner) from your IRA** directly to Kids First each year. Because the IRA assets go directly to Kids First, you don't owe any taxes on the distribution. Once you are 73 years old, you can use your gift to satisfy all or part of your annual **required minimum distribution** without having to pay income taxes on the gift. You can also direct a one-time \$50,000 distribution to a charitable remainder trust or charitable gift annuity.

ENDOWMENT

Inspire lasting impact and **leave a legacy with a gift to Kids First's endowment**. Iowa donors: you can take advantage of the Endow Iowa Tax Credit and **get a 25% state tax credit** (as well as qualifying for the federal charitable deduction if you itemize) for a gift made to Kids First's endowment at the Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation.



Kids First Law Center
420 6th St. SE, Suite 160
Cedar Rapids, IA 52401

ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED

A full-page background image of a starry night sky with the Milky Way galaxy visible, featuring numerous stars and nebulae in shades of blue, purple, and orange.

**A child's future is better
because of you.**

319.365.5437 | www.kidsfirstiowa.org

Thank you to Mercy Medical Center for the printing of this annual report!