



ANNUAL REPORT 2020

To improve the lives of vulnerable children and families through legal representation and advocacy in the courts, legislature, schools and community.

Youth,
Rights &
Justice



WE'RE FIGHTING TO PROTECT KIDS AND PARENTS INVOLVED IN THE **FOSTER CARE** SYSTEM.

Youth, Rights & Justice attorneys are appointed by the court to represent children and parents involved in the child welfare system. Our obligation to our clients is to protect their rights and amplify their voices. We bring a trauma-informed lens to our work, seeking to promote resilience, dignity, and respect.

We've been fighting to ensure parents and children in foster care can visit each other, even during the pandemic, because preserving family connections minimizes trauma and supports family reunification. We've developed expertise in locating housing, food, daycare, and other services that remove barriers for parents working to reunify with their children.

Although how we conduct our work has changed in 2020, YRJ remains committed to providing client-centered zealous advocacy. Since the pandemic began, access to court has been limited and lawyers have had to get creative to help clients achieve their goals. Most court hearings are by phone, so preparation, persistence, and patience are critical to successful outcomes. This has been a stressful year for many families,

but YRJ continues to be a leader in defending the rights of families impacted by the foster care system.

**On any given day,
Youth, Rights & Justice
represents an average
of **750** children
in the
child welfare system.**



WE PROTECT THE

EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE.

In 2002, Youth, Rights & Justice established the innovative SchoolWorks program in response to poor educational outcomes experienced by many children in foster care. Without strong advocacy, these students are more likely to go without essential services, to be denied entry to school, and be deprived of their legal rights. The resulting harm can last a lifetime.

Through SchoolWorks, YRJ provides the support our clients need to succeed. Whether we are working with teachers to create a distance learning plan for a student with disabilities or ensuring a foster child can stay in their school despite moving foster homes, YRJ is there. Since March, YRJ staff expanded our reach to ensure that all of our school-aged clients have access to the school support they need to learn from home.

Barriers to school deprive youth of meaningful opportunities for education, future employment, and productive citizenship. As we continue our work to disrupt this cycle, YRJ is proud to announce that this year our SchoolWorks program has new and dedicated funding to increase our outreach and advocacy for youth in the juvenile justice system.

**“Oregon
graduation rate
for foster children
just 35%”**

– *The Oregonian*, March 26, 2019



WE DEFEND THE RIGHTS OF YOUTH INVOLVED IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM.

We believe that children should not be judged their entire life for actions committed on their worst day. As court-appointed attorneys for over 300 youth involved in the juvenile justice system, we work as hard to encourage our clients as we do to defend them. Youth have an amazing capacity to learn, grow and change. As defenders, we provide a critical check on the power of the state, empower our young clients to seek the help they need, and work to remove barriers so that they can become successful adults.

The use of detention causes serious harm to youth and this has only been exacerbated by the spread of COVID-19. Youth placed in detention are both at a greater risk of contracting the disease and can experience harm from the very measures put in place to protect against an outbreak. Limited family communication, restricted access to education, plus isolation and anxiety around contracting the disease can be detrimental to the health of children held in detention.

YRJ worked diligently with community partners to have youth in detention released and placed into less restrictive and more appropriate environments.

“This [pandemic] crisis is forcing our systems to do things that we should do all the time ... look at what are alternatives for kids instead of defaulting to detention.”

– YRJ Supervising Attorney Lisa Kay Williams,
Public News Service April 28, 2020



OUR CLIENTS' EXPERIENCES

INSPIRE **SYSTEM**
REFORM THAT BENEFITS
ALL OREGONIANS.

Since our founding in 1975, Youth, Rights & Justice has continually pushed for system reform and legislation that helps our clients get the care and support they need and that remove barriers to their success. In 2019, we returned to federal court to enforce the terms of a settlement agreement with the Department of Human Services that restricted the use of temporarily lodging foster children in hotels. That same year we championed HB 2849, which heightens court oversight when children are removed from parents and reduces unnecessary family separation. We joined with advocates and legislators from across the state in support of SB 1008 (2019), eliminating the automatic waiver of youth into adult court.

Next year in the legislature, we will work to eliminate fines and fees for youth and families involved in the juvenile justice system and to expand

access to expunction for individuals with a juvenile record. We often see the same issues arising again and again for many of our clients, and it is their experiences that inspire us to take action.

YRJ has championed laws and reforms that have helped over

500,000
Oregonians.



OUR **VISION FOR THE FUTURE** IS **INCLUSIVE, EQUITABLE AND POSSIBLE.**

Our clients—children and families in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems—inspire a vision where their voice is at the center of our work. A vision where youth aren't forever judged by their actions on the worst day of their lives. A vision where race, income, or neighborhood doesn't play a role in what justice looks like. A vision where lawyers and social workers work as a team to find justice for families in the child welfare system.

Our vision is lofty, but these small steps will keep us headed in the right direction. We will:

- Protect the constitutional rights of our clients through client-centered, holistic defense.
- Undergo equity-focused strategic planning, ensuring that diversity, equity & inclusion principles are integrated into our work.
- Advocate for equity in the juvenile justice system through legislation and policy changes.
- Grow SchoolWorks so that more children in foster care and the juvenile justice system benefit from education advocacy.
- Pursue child welfare system reforms that minimize trauma, promote reunification, and reduce the need for foster care.



HOW YRJ HELPED ME GET MY LIFE BACK

A STORY FROM OUR FORMER CLIENT



I never would have guessed that a shoving match as a teenager would get me fired, 15 years later, from the job I loved. But that's what happened.

I grew up in foster care and was angry about my situation. So angry that, at age 14, I started a fight that led to an assault conviction.

As I grew up, the memory of the fight faded away. I went to school, had children, and got a fulfilling job at a local caretaking company.

Imagine my surprise when my boss called me into his office and fired me because I had an assault conviction on my record that I didn't disclose. I thought there must be a mistake ... and then I remembered that angry 14-year-old.

Right away I went to get my record expunged, but the form was so complicated that I didn't know what to do. I completed the form the best I could, and submitted it to the court. My expunction was granted, or so I thought, and my boss hired me back. Little did I know that only half of my record was expunged; some agencies still had records of the assault.

I applied for a promotion and, instead of getting the promotion, I was accused of lying about my record and told I could be fired. I had to wonder, how many times would my juvenile court record get in the way of my success?

This time, I wasn't taking any chances. I reached out to my former attorney at Youth, Rights & Justice. They represented me, getting another court order that ensured complete sealing of my record. Because of YRJ, I can leave my past mistakes behind.

— Story told to YRJ by a former client

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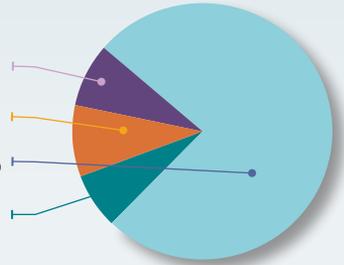


BY THE NUMBERS

Since our founding in 1975, YRJ has represented over 25,000 children and parents in the juvenile court system. Today, YRJ consists of a highly dedicated team of 39 attorneys, legal assistants, and other specialists who provide legal representation, impact (class action) litigation, and public policy advocacy. YRJ is governed by a 16-member board of directors who come from law firms, as well as the education, public relations, and business sectors. Through all of our work, YRJ has improved the lives of over 500,000 children and families across Oregon.

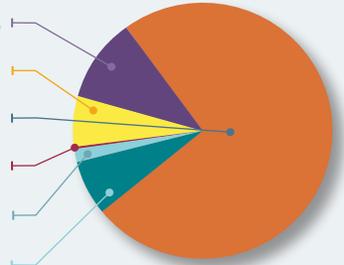
2019 REVENUE

Administration	\$246,720	8.04%
Fundraising	\$255,471	8.32%
Public Defense	\$2,343,238	76.33%
SchoolWorks	\$224,646	7.32%
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	\$3,070,075	



2019 EXPENSES

Administration	\$306,166	10.72%
Fundraising	\$183,699	6.43%
Public Defense	\$2,117,061	74.15%
Special Litigation	\$9,649	0.34%
Legislative	\$42,000	1.47%
SchoolWorks	\$196,389	6.88%
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	\$2,854,964	



*The Youth, Rights & Justice fiscal year is January 1 to December 31.
These figures have been audited by Hoffman, Stewart & Schmidt, P.C.*

WAYS TO GIVE

Youth,
Rights &
Justice

The urgent work of Youth, Rights & Justice would not be possible without the support of our donors. In a year when deep-rooted injustice has been further exposed, and when the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened our clients' needs, your support is critical. Please give today.

For more information on giving, contact Laurel Keppy at (503) 232-2540 or laurel.k@youthrightsjustice.org. Contributions to Youth, Rights & Justice are tax-deductible.

MAKE A CONTRIBUTION TODAY to Youth, Rights & Justice:

- ➔ 1785 NE Sandy Blvd., Suite 300, Portland, OR 97232
- ➔ Give online at youthrightsjustice.org
- ➔ Make a gift of stock
- ➔ Submit a matching gift request with your employer to double the impact of your contribution



Make a contribution through the Willamette Week Give!Guide by December 31, 2020. giveguide.org/#youthrightsjustice

OUR MISSION: To improve the lives of vulnerable children and families through legal representation and advocacy in the courts, legislature, schools and community.

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