

**MISSION** To protect the needs and rights of children involved in high conflict divorce and custody cases, while educating and supporting those who have the greatest influence on children.



CCS MONTHLY: CHILDREN TODAY

May/June 2007 Vol. 1 No. 7

[www.childcenteredsolutions.org](http://www.childcenteredsolutions.org)

In 7 months, Child Centered Solutions has given a voice to 20 children and their families!

## Upcoming CCS Events:

August 3-5, 2007:  
"Clean Out Your Closets for Kids  
Garage Sale Benefit"  
For details or to make a donation to  
the sale, contact us at  
[info@childcenteredsolutions.org](mailto:info@childcenteredsolutions.org)

November 30, 2007:  
"Effective Representation of Children  
Training"  
Send a message to  
[info@childcenteredsolutions.org](mailto:info@childcenteredsolutions.org) to  
receive information about this  
upcoming seminar.  
*Space is limited*

## Board of Directors:

**Jody Stahancyk, President**  
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**The Honorable Elizabeth Welch**  
Senior Judge

**Darcy Snodgrass**

## Personnel:

**Leslie Abraham**  
Executive Director/  
Senior Attorney

**Jennifer Gilmore**  
Staff Attorney

**Ben Sadler**  
Assistant Director

## From the Director's Chair

Notes from Executive Director Leslie Abraham



Wow, what an incredible event! Keynote speaker, Dr. Joan Kelly, provided valuable information on the impact of divorce on children and the need to create effective parenting plans. Rumor has it that Multnomah County will be reevaluating its standard parenting plans in light of Dr. Kelly's research. Dr. Kelly was

very impressed with our community and is excited at the possibility of returning for a future day-long event.

On November 30, 2007, Child Centered Solutions will present a full-day training on effective representation of children. This training will provide attorneys with the practical skills and theoretical knowledge necessary for representing children.

Child Centered Solutions is making a major impact by focusing attention onto children where it belongs. We continue to assist in settling cases, protecting children from the trauma they would otherwise experience in protracted custody battles. And when cases do go to trial, we are the children's voices in court.

Thank you – without you, children's voices could not be heard!

## Spotlight on Our Child Clients

*As always, the names of our clients and any identifying details about their lives have been changed to protect their privacy.*

**CCS finds creative solutions so children can maintain relationships with both parents.**

CCS speaks for children when their parents can't hear them. As Charlie, age 11, alternated parenting time between his mother and father, he was feeling caught in the middle of his parents' struggle. Charlie's mother, preferring the school district more convenient to her home, insisted that he leave his neighborhood school and his friends. Charlie's father was equally insistent that Charlie remain at his current school, which was closer to Dad's home. But no one was listening to Charlie.

CCS gave a voice to Charlie by alerting his parents and the court to Charlie's concerns about changing school districts. CCS advocated for a parenting plan that reflected what was important to Charlie: being with his friends at his current school while remaining close to both parents. The court implemented our more child centered solution.

## Quote of the Month: May

**"There are no seven wonders of the world in the eyes of a child.'There are seven million."**

- Walt Streightiff, Author

**Thank you to everyone who made our inaugural event, Divorce and Children's Adjustment, a success – we could not have done it without YOU!**

**Missed the seminar? DVDs of the seminar with Dr. Joan B. Kelly, are available for purchase for \$100.**

**Please contact Child Centered Solutions for information at (503) 546-6383 or [info@childcenteredsolutions.org](mailto:info@childcenteredsolutions.org).**

## When Being Your Child's Friend Goes Too Far

By Ben Sadler, Assistant Director

Based on the April 5, 2007, *New York Times* article, "Mommy and Daddy's Little Life Coach," by Stephanie Rosenbloom.

As social and family dynamics change, the tendency for parents to treat their children as friends, confidants or equals has become pervasive. Parents are turning to their children for decisions that go far beyond the naming of a new household pet; many seek the counsel of their children on everything from real estate transactions to relationship advice. This may be a dangerous trend.

This changing dynamic between parents and children has been created, in part, by the increase in single parent homes. In 2003, approximately 28% of children lived with only one parent, up from approximately 12% in 1970, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. One possible consequence is the changing structure of the parent-child relationship, as the parent seeks a greater sense of companionship from the child than he or she might have otherwise.

While incorporating children into some family decision-making may be beneficial to children, relying on their input for more important decisions overlooks issues with developmental psychology and basic parenting that could be harmful to both parent and child.

Parents relying too heavily on their children's decision-making should be aware that the area of the brain that plays a significant role in judgment does not fully develop until a person is in his or her 20's. Studies have shown that children and adolescents are less able to delay gratification, inhibit their behavior, anticipate the future or learn from negative consequences. By placing significant decisions in the hands of children, parents take great risks for both themselves and their children.

Perhaps more importantly, by relying on children to make decisions that more properly belong with adults, parents neglect their responsibility to steward their child. Children given too much power at too young an age may feel unsafe. The pressure of making life-altering decisions blurs boundaries between child and parent, forcing children to believe they can no longer rely on their parents as support figures.

Stewardship parents give children opportunities to make decisions in safe and structured scenarios, shown to be beneficial to children's development. By incrementally expanding children's decision-making opportunities, parents help their children learn valuable lessons, improve their self-esteem and increase their independent thinking.

Treating children with respect and soliciting their input in age-appropriate ways is a great way to help them develop into strong, healthy, autonomous individuals. When broaching larger decisions with a child, however, think about whether putting a decision of that weight on a child's shoulders is in their best interests.

## The Lawyer's Impact on Children – from the Court's Point of View

By Jenny Gilmore, Staff Attorney

*Based on conversations with the Honorable Susan M. Svetkey, Multnomah County Family and Juvenile Court Judge and founder of the Children's Representation Project.*

The child's attorney must be a champion for his child clients by advocating their needs to the court and ensuring that their best interests remain at the forefront of everyone's minds throughout the custody process.

In Oregon, many of the contested custody and parenting time cases involve high-conflict families in which the best interests of the children can be difficult to ascertain. As parents zealously advocate their own legal positions, the information they convey to the court often reflects the parents' views and needs rather than those of their children. Without a direct legal advocate for the children at issue, family court judges have limited opportunity to separate out the best interests of those children.

Children's attorneys ensure that all relevant legal issues facing the children are communicated accurately and effectively to the family court judges. Through independent investigation, attorneys provide information to the court about the child that might otherwise go unreported.

The children's attorney can also use his or her position to help the parties reach full or partial settlement. By facilitating compromise and cooperation between the parents, children's attorneys ensure better outcomes for their child clients and help the court by relieving an already overflowing court docket.

*Next month: The Lawyer's Impact on Children – From the Child's Point of View*



Our privacy policy is available online at [www.childcenteredsolutions.org/privacy.html](http://www.childcenteredsolutions.org/privacy.html)

CCS is a public benefit corporation that has been incorporated in the state of Oregon and is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)3 tax exempt status.

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