



The Alliance *for* Children's Rights
protecting the future of all children

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

It is the mission of The Alliance for Children's Rights' to protect the rights of abused, neglected or impoverished children in the Los Angeles foster care system.

Overview

Alliance efforts are focused in three areas: direct legal services and representation, education and community training, and advocacy. The Alliance provides legal services, advocacy and advice in the areas of foster care and foster children's adoptions, probate legal guardianships, special education, emancipation, public benefits, denial of medical treatment or healthcare benefits, and advocacy on behalf of transitioning youth. Clients include runaway and emancipating youth, relative and non-relative caregivers, children with educational, physical and/or emotional disabilities, siblings, and parents with terminal illnesses. Many of our clients are non-English speaking.

The Alliance staff includes lawyers, social workers, medical health specialists, paralegals and advocates supplemented by over a thousand pro bono attorneys and volunteers who donate their time to help disadvantaged children and ensure their voices are heard.

Volunteers work under the direction of the pro bono coordinator and intake supervisor to:

- ❑ answer intake calls from community.
- ❑ analyze and assess individual clients' needs
- ❑ participate in direct communication with clients
- ❑ review each case with a staff attorney to determine what assistance is needed
- ❑ assist in the development of resource/informational materials for clients
- ❑ work with attorneys to advocate for clients and for legislative reform.

Volunteers work on-site at the Alliance's offices, located at 3333 Wilshire Ave., Suite 550, Los Angeles, CA, 90010, between the hours of 8:30 AM to 5:30 PM, Monday through Friday.

Requirements

- ❑ good communication and writing skills.
- ❑ Spanish-language proficiency preferred but not required
- ❑ a minimum of 6-8 hours of volunteer time per week
- ❑ all volunteers are interviewed prior to volunteering

Please send resume and cover letter to: Diego Cartagena, d.cartagena@kids-alliance.org, or call at (213) 368-6010, ext. 127.

Adoption

The Foster Children's Adoption Program works to finalize hundreds of foster children's adoptions each year. Many of these adoptions are finalized through the Adoption Day Program, which was started by The Alliance and is now a National model to promote foster care adoption. We expedite adoptions by working with the Los Angeles Children's Court, The Department of Children and Family Services, and minor's attorneys to remove barriers to adoption in individual cases. We also work with DCFS, the court and other Los Angeles child welfare stakeholders on systemic reform of the adoption process and DCFS policies. *Pro bono* attorneys have the opportunity to take on cases representing adoptive parents in finalizing their foster child adoption. Adoption cases require a time commitment of approximately 10 hours and *pro bono* attorneys are trained on adoption finalization.

Public Benefits & Children's Court Advocacy

The Public Benefits Program works with minor's attorneys, social workers, judicial officers, and foster care providers to ensure that all children in the foster care system receive the monthly financial benefits to which they are entitled. We represent foster care providers at administrative fair hearings on inappropriate benefits denials. We also work with the Department of Children and Family Services to obtain the appropriate specialized care rates and services for the many children in foster care with special medical and emotional needs. *Pro bono* attorneys have the opportunity to advocate for benefits and services, prepare hearing requests and briefs, and represent clients at administrative fair hearings. Benefits cases require a time commitment of approximately 15-20 hours and *pro bono* attorneys are trained in benefits advocacy.

Special Education

The Special Education Program assists foster children with disabilities access appropriate educational placements and support services. Local school districts are under a mandate to provide each special education student with a free appropriate public education ("FAPE") tailored to meet the unique needs of each student. Children in foster care with disabilities face unique challenges within the special education system. For example, because of numerous foster care placement changes, many of their important school documents may be lost or they are often not tested appropriately or often enough for their service providers to have an adequate understanding of their needs. In addition, these children are more likely than other students with disabilities to have inappropriate educational programs due to not having a consistent and knowledgeable caregiver to successfully advocate for their needs. Because of this dual disadvantage of being a student with a disability who is also in the foster care system, many of these children are in desperate need of advocacy to ensure that they have appropriate educational programs. *Pro bonos* have the opportunity to represent children in obtaining an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and some cases are so dire that they require pursuit of an administrative due process hearing and/or mediation to ensure that local school districts are meeting the child's unique needs. *Pro bono* attorneys are trained in special education advocacy.

Transitioning Youth & Mentoring

Every year over 1,500 youth "age out" of the Los Angeles foster care system without the support system of a family or parents to help them transition into adulthood. Of the many obstacles these youth face, untangling outstanding legal barriers is a vital first step. Through The Alliance's NextSTEP Program, which focuses on the transitioning youth population, *pro bono* attorneys can

help these youth overcome these barriers by presenting at on-site legal clinics to residents of Transitional Housing Programs throughout Los Angeles County. The wide variety of topics includes identity theft, tenants' rights, income tax preparation, accessing public benefits, buying or leasing a car, sealing juvenile records, clearing tickets and warrants, and understanding contracts. *Pro bono* attorneys also have the opportunity to provide these youth with direct representation and advocacy on specific cases. Such advocacy ranges from transactional work to representation at administrative and/or court hearings. NextSTEP also offers a Mentoring Program for former foster youth seeking a supportive adult to help them as they transition into adulthood and independent living. Mentors can empower youth to make better life choices, help them achieve academic success, embark on career exploration, and attain personal goals.

Guardianship

The Guardianship Program represents the over 300,000 children in Los Angeles County living with non-parent caregivers. Guardianship not only affords the caregivers legal authority over a child's educational and medical welfare and allows them access to available financial benefits, it provides vital emotional and physical security to children who are in desperate need of a stable, caring placement. Legal guardianship also protects children and caregivers from the possibility of an unfit or even dangerous parent removing a child from their care. In addition to offering a monthly *in pro per* clinic for clients to complete the necessary guardianship paperwork, The Alliance also assists clients with joint guardianships, when a parent is terminally ill and wants to appoint a legal co-guardian to assume parental duties. The Alliance places over 100 cases yearly with attorneys in our *pro bono* network; *pro bono* attorneys assist caregivers in completing guardianship paperwork and represent clients at their guardianship hearings. Guardianship cases require a time commitment of approximately 7-10 hours and *pro bono* attorneys are trained on guardianship matters.

Intake

In addition to work on a specific project, all extern/interns will participate in intake. Most clients of The Alliance for Children's Rights are referrals from courts, other nonprofit organizations or governmental agencies. At present, most of our intake is conducted by telephone. These telephone calls provide the first contact potential clients have with The Alliance. The calls come from a variety of sources, including parents, foster parents, social workers, Dependency Court attorneys for minors, teens, or caregivers. Often callers are in a crisis situation which requires immediate legal services or advocacy. The calls are compelling and the circumstances facing many of these potential clients are dire and urgent. The intake process is structured so that intake workers are able to gather essential information and present it for review by staff attorneys at a daily Case Review session. Staff attorneys evaluate the information retrieved during the intake process and give specific instructions to the extern/intern as to the next steps to be taken which may sometimes include additional client contact or referrals to other agencies. Case Review provides a valuable learning experience for law students. It is an opportunity for the exchange of ideas relating to factual situations and applicable legal theories and exposes the extern/intern to a wide variety of cases, conflicts and circumstances that may or may not become Alliance cases.

A legal externship/internship with The Alliance for Children's Rights offers a broad range of legal and advocacy experiences for law students. It provides hands-on client contact and direct provision of legal services to people who might not otherwise have access to legal

representation. The atmosphere is collegial, cooperative and supportive. Your experience at The Alliance for Children's Rights is one you will long remember.