



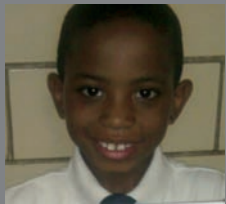
Making New York
a better place
child by child.

PFCR News

news from PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

FALL 2011

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PFCR Retirement

PFCR President Warren Sinsheimer Receives Judge Weinfeld Award



*Honoree Warren Sinsheimer
and NYU Law School Dean
Richard Revesz*

PFCR President Warren Sinsheimer added one more award to his collection of prestigious accolades on September 26 when he was presented with NYU Law School's esteemed Judge Edward Weinfeld Award at a gala, black tie event at New York City's Mandarin Oriental Hotel.

To a crowd of over 350 attendees, NYU Law School Dean Richard Revesz, who noted that the Weinfeld Award recognizes the professional distinction of alumni who graduated from the Law School 50 years ago or more, described Mr. Sinsheimer (LL.M '57) as "a spectacular example of someone who has made it a priority to give back over the years, and even more importantly, he is inspirational in his message to others to do the same."

Mr. Sinsheimer founded the non-profit PFCR in 1999 after working in corporate law for 45 years, having retired from Patterson, Belknap, Webb & Tyler in 1996. He continues to work as a full-time PFCR volunteer, seldom missing a day at the office. His philanthropic support for both PFCR and NYU Law School are legendary. Four years ago, he established the Sinsheimer Children's Rights Fellowship at NYU Law School, enabling recent law graduates to work for a year as a PFCR attorney for low-income, special needs children. PFCR's fourth Sinsheimer fellow, Charles Gussow, has just begun his year at PFCR.

In 1993, Mr. Sinsheimer established the Sinsheimer Service Scholarship within the Root-Tilden-Kern Program

at the NYU School of Law, which pays full tuition each year for a student of outstanding academic merit and leadership potential who demonstrates a strong commitment to providing direct representation in civil legal matters to individuals who cannot otherwise afford such representation and promises to pursue such work in the US for at least three years after law school graduation. "When my wife [Flo] and I established the Sinsheimer Service Scholarship at the Law School, it was our hope that its graduates would help to fill the need for talented lawyers for those who could not afford legal representation," explained Mr. Sinsheimer in his acceptance speech, which garnered a standing ovation. "Our hopes have been fully realized. Sinsheimer scholars have and are providing services all over the United States. Flo and I are very proud of them." The first recipient of the Sinsheimer Service Scholarship, Christopher Meade, currently principal deputy general counsel at the United States Department of Treasury, presented Mr. Sinsheimer's Judge Weinfeld award to him.

"Warren Sinsheimer is a spectacular example of someone who has made it a priority to give back over the years, and even more importantly, he is inspirational in his message to others to do the same."

Summing up Mr. Sinsheimer's prodigious accomplishments as an attorney and humanitarian, Dean Revesz concluded, "Warren's support of the Law School and its students has not only made a difference

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Josiah Bell proudly displays his Student of the Month Award at his new school.

PFCR Client Makes Rapid Progress with Public School Supports

It is rare that PFCR attorneys have the opportunity to witness a client success story in just six short months – it typically takes a full year of school to see results – but client Josiah Bell presented just such a victory. One of three brothers, all diagnosed with severe emotional disturbances and histories of academic failure, seven year old Josiah continually disrupted his classroom with unpredictable outbursts, destruction of school property, and verbal abuse, and he was on the verge of being sent to a residential facility when his mother, Barbara, first sought the help of PFCR last spring. After taking on Josiah’s case, outgoing Sinsheimer fellow Scott Hechinger won the reinstatement of related services for Josiah, including a bus paraprofessional, speech and language therapy, and occupational therapy, all of which had been inexplicably dropped from his Individualized Education Program (IEP). Hechinger also secured a one-to-one crisis paraprofessional to remain with Josiah throughout the school day. Significantly, all of these services were required to be provided within the boy’s public school classroom setting. Fast forward six months, and Josiah has been twice

voted Student of the Month for his model behavior at his public school, a momentous accolade considering how dire his educational reality had been just a few months ago. His mother reports that Josiah looks forward to going to school for the first time ever, that he does his homework without being asked, and understands what he’s studying. “He’s like a whole new child,” exclaimed Barbara with palpable emotion. “PFCR opened up a new door for me and for Josiah. He didn’t just make a 90 degree turn in his life- he made a 180 degree turn. This would not have happened if I did not have PFCR on my side.” For his part, attorney Hechinger is understandably ecstatic: “It’s all about finding creative solutions. I’m so happy that we could keep Josiah in a public school setting with appropriate supports, and I look forward to his steady improvement,” he said with satisfaction.

“He’s like a whole new child. PFCR opened up a new door for me and Josiah. ...This would not have happened if I did not have PFCR on my side.”

Josiah's mother, Barbara

Summer Law Interns Master Crucial Skills at PFCR

Each summer, PFCR selects two stellar, first year law students from a field of immensely qualified candidates, providing them with a ten week, supervised work experience where they learn first-hand how special education law can change poor people’s lives. PFCR’s 2011 summer interns, Amanda Meyer and Ali Puente-Douglass, lived up to their superlative billing, honing their burgeoning legal expertise by handling client intake, drafting hearing requests for staff attorneys, and researching legal issues for an upcoming second circuit case.

“I was fortunate to have a broad range of different tasks at PFCR,” explained Columbia Law student Amanda Meyer, who learned over the summer that she had been selected for Columbia’s prestigious Law Review. Ms. Meyer developed a zeal for education advocacy as a Teach for America educator in the South Bronx, where she was assigned to a middle school classroom. “I did a lot of advocating for my students’ learning needs,” she recalled, setting up small group instruction to foster differentiated learning, providing individualized tutoring, and introducing multi-sensory computer programs into the classroom to help English Language Learners. “I want to help effect change to make sure that students’ needs are met on whatever functional level they are on,” she reflected, adding that PFCR’s many staff mentors provided a rich learning process for her, while whetting her appetite for continued coursework in education law as a second year student this semester.

NYU School of Law student Ali Puente-Douglass also developed an interest in the law following her experience as a Teach For America educator. Ms. Puente-Douglass found her TFA experience in a third grade classroom in Newark to be “challenging and frustrating...so many of my students had obvious learning difficulties but were not getting the special education services they required...and parents did not know how to effectively advocate for their children.” As a Root-Tilden-Kern Scholar at NYU School of Law, Ms. Puente-Douglass receives full tuition in exchange for a pledge to practice public interest law for at least ten years after graduation. Her summer at PFCR strengthened her resolve to advocate for poor children with disabilities: “I wish that an organization like PFCR had existed in Newark,” she mused. “It is great to have an entire organization like PFCR dedicated to getting kids the Free Appropriate Public Education they deserve.”



Amanda Meyer



Ali Puente-Douglass

From the President

Many of our clients are beginning their school year filled with a newfound spirit of hope. For the first time in their lives, they are in an educational placement that is geared to their special learning needs. Over and over again, grateful parents tell me and my colleagues at PFCR that their child is now happy to go to school, no longer feeling like "the stupid one" in class, no longer the target of peer bullying and humiliation. Such is the case with Josiah Bell, who was on the verge of being sent to a residential facility until former Sinsheimer fellow Scott Hechinger took on his case, arranging for him to remain in a public school classroom with supportive services to ameliorate his emotionally destructive behavior. As you'll read in this issue, Josiah has been twice awarded "student of the month" for his model behavior this fall, an accolade that reflects the rapid progress he has been able to make in an educational placement that is tailored to his special needs.

In September we welcomed to PFCR our fourth Sinsheimer fellow, Charles Gussow, who became a first-time father to new daughter Madeline just two months ago. Charles' energy and passion for helping his poor clients is palpable: he is already handling a caseload of some 22 clients, providing each with careful legal advice and representation that will help insure access to a free appropriate public education. We are fortunate that Charles will learn how to advocate and litigate from some of the best and brightest education lawyers in the city, and we look forward to starting him off on his public service law career.

As always, we could not help our vulnerable clients to succeed without your steadfast partnership and support. I thank you from the bottom of my heart as we strive to make New York a better place, child by child!

Warren Sinsheimer
President



Longtime PFCR Volunteer Attorney Charles Bergoffen Announces Retirement



Charles Bergoffen

To the astonishment of his colleagues, volunteer attorney Charles Bergoffen recently announced his impending retirement from PFCR. Mr. Bergoffen was in private practice in New York City for over 30 years and then served as a vice-president and associate general counsel at Marsh & McLennan until his retirement, subsequently joining PFCR in 2005. The Yale Law School graduate and Law Journal editor, whose rare moments of "downtime" include tackling the most challenging New York Times and Harper's magazine crossword puzzles and regaling fellow baseball fans with his knowledge of baseball lore and history, has been widely respected at PFCR as "precise and methodical in his legal writing...a warm and giving individual who develops a wonderful relationship with his clients and their parents," according to PFCR executive director Todd Silverblatt.

Mr. Bergoffen is leaving the organization on a note of well-earned professional pride, having just won two long and arduous cases on behalf of his severely disabled clients – one a physically disabled boy with additional mental impairments who will continue to receive physical and occupational therapy as well as an academic program geared to his learning differences in a private school setting; the second, a 17 year old autistic girl who will continue to attend a transitional program in life skills to learn how to live independently, travel throughout the city on public transportation, and, through structured internships, eventually hold down a job. "I felt elation knowing that we had prevailed in these cases," recalled Mr. Bergoffen with a smile. "I did something I believed in, and I did something of lasting significance for these children and their families."

"I did something I believed in, and I did something of lasting significance for these children and their families."

As Mr. Bergoffen prepares to clean out his overflowing files, he thinks back on his successful career at PFCR, describing his triumphs on behalf of PFCR clients in characteristic baseball jargon: "I have a 1000 batting average in my contested cases, but very few official times at bat [most of his private school cases have been settled prior to hearing]." His work has also included counseling clients in collaboration with PFCR's social services professionals and negotiating with the DOE to secure appropriate placements and services within the public school system. But his impact will be felt most strongly not in his legal

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PFCR on the Road

PFCR staff attorney Michael Hampden recently conducted a training workshop sponsored by Legal Services NYC on the handling of SSI Child Disability Cases, with a focus on mental disorders. Renowned citywide for his expertise in education law, Mr. Hampden advised his colleagues in other pro bono organizations on how to advocate effectively for children with disabilities, including understanding cognitive and achievement testing of children and obtaining evaluations and other records.



Michael Hampden



PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

271 MADISON AVENUE, 17TH FLOOR
NEW YORK, NY 10016

PFCR Mission

Making New York

A Better Place – Child by Child

Partnership for Children's Rights (PFCR), founded in 1999 as Legal Services for Children, is dedicated to protecting the rights of New York City's disadvantaged and disabled children. PFCR attorneys and social services professionals work together to help special needs children gain access to educational services and programs they need. As a result of PFCR's intervention, children have been able to attend public or private schools which are geared to their particular learning disabilities, or to obtain tutoring or special services (such as physical, occupational, or speech therapy) to augment their education within their school setting. In each case, the services provided have enabled PFCR clients to make progress toward a self-sufficient and productive future that would otherwise have been unattainable. PFCR serves families whose total income is less than 250% of the federal poverty guidelines.

Editor – Emily Sherwood

Sinsheimer Awarded, *continued from page 1*

in the careers of dozens of students and NYU Law graduates, it has impacted the lives of thousands of children and their families. Often the legal world is divided into dichotomous categories. People go and work either for the for-profit sector, or do public interest. Warren has shown better than most how you can do both at a very high level."

No stranger to public recognition, Mr. Sinsheimer recently received the Diane Lipton Award for Outstanding Educational Advocacy from the national Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates. His numerous other accolades include induction into the Channel 13 Hall of Fame; recognition as New Yorker of the Week on NY1 channel; numerous Bar Association awards, including the Pro Bono Publico award from the American Bar Association; and an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Drew University.

Bergoffen, *continued from page 3*

record, but in the compassion and charitable traits that he has role modeled for his peers. "Charles typifies the quintessential PFCR volunteer," summed up Todd Silverblatt. "With all of his intellectual interests, he could have spent his days in more selfish pursuits, but instead he has recognized the importance of his work to society, and he derives deep fulfillment from helping those who are less fortunate."