



# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2014

*Promoting and defending the rights of children and youth to safe and stable homes, quality education and healthcare, and a voice in decisions that affect their lives.*



## Dear Friends of Pegasus Legal Services for Children,

Last week I drove from Albuquerque to Las Cruces, New Mexico, to talk to young parents at the GRADS program at Rio Grande Prep about family law.

The group of 14 students peppered me with questions for an hour and a half: What about when the grandparents don't like the baby's father and won't let him see her? What if you don't want the father on the birth certificate? Can a father give up his rights? My ex-girlfriend is using drugs and she left the baby with me. I'm afraid she'll come back and take him. What can I do? And what does Pegasus do to help?

It was clear that these young parents were all dealing with difficult situations — troubled home lives, unstable housing, abusive ex-partners — all on top of trying to parent young kids while attending high school full-time. I tried to give them clear, concise, and practical answers. At the end of the presentation I was exhausted, but glad the students were so engaged.

Driving back to Albuquerque with a

dramatic cloud-scape overhead, I felt lucky to be able to help young people like those I met in Las Cruces. And, I thought about how grateful I am for the team of passionate and committed lawyers, staff, and volunteers back at the office in Albuquerque.



**In 2014, Pegasus continued to grow, but the volume of people calling to ask for help ballooned. In addition to more calls from children, youth, and caregivers, we are receiving more and more requests from other legal services providers, social services providers, and city, county, and state agencies to partner on a variety of projects.**

Since 2002, Pegasus has evolved from a small start-up non-profit into an established organization looked to by clients, community members, professionals, government officials, and policy makers for guidance on the myriad issues affecting New Mexico's children and youth. The

challenge ahead is how to remain responsive to our clients and the community, while still growing so we can help more people and effect more positive change for New Mexico's children and youth.

We are incredibly grateful to all the people and organizations who help and support us in many ways. As they say, it takes a village to raise a child: you have helped Pegasus grow into an invaluable resource for New Mexico's children and youth. And we thank you for that.

— *Liz McGrath, Executive Director*

### Audited Financial Statement, Fiscal Year 2014

#### Revenue: \$637,227

Contracts	\$ 431,345.00	68%
Charitable Donations	\$ 89,830.00	14%
Grants	\$ 88,987.00	14%
Attorney's Fees	\$ 27,065.00	4%

#### Expenses: \$623,634

Program	\$ 526,164.00	85%
Management & General	\$ 83,721.00	13%
Fundraising	\$ 13,749.00	2%

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# Pegasus Legal Services Helps . . .

**Grandparents and caregivers** obtain guardianship under the Kinship Guardianship Act, to ensure that children and grandchildren under their care can live in safe and stable homes until the children's parents can once again assume responsibility for them

**Young parents** establish court-ordered parenting plans, setting out the rights and responsibilities (including child support) of both parents. This helps minimize all-too-common power struggles between young parents, which contribute to unhealthy home lives for the children — and long-term negative effects on young parents and their children such as dropping out of school, homelessness, jail, domestic violence, and multi-generational poverty.

**Children in Foster Care** navigate the uncertainty that comes with being removed from abusive or neglectful parents and placed in foster care. Pegasus's staff and contract attorneys advocate on the child's behalf to make sure that social workers, judges, and parents alike fully understand and respect the best interests and wishes of the child.

**Homeless and Runaway Youth**, who often leave home because of abuse, neglect, and/or domestic violence. Without a parent or legal guardian to authorize basic life decisions — school, healthcare, housing, and much more — these young people turn to Pegasus for help enrolling in school, getting key documents needed for normal life (like birth certificates and social security cards), and getting legally emancipated in order to live and work independently.



**Parents of Children with Special Education Needs** make sure school districts comply with federal laws designed to protect the rights of children with disabilities. Families of these children have enough problems without having to fight for education — a right guaranteed by law but difficult for families to secure without help.

**Youth involved in the Juvenile Justice System** overcome barriers to employment by helping them get their records sealed or expunged, obtain identity documents, and become emancipated.

Pegasus Legal Services for Children helps children and youth in dire circumstances find positive solutions that support their long term goals. We provide direct legal representation and community legal education, and work on legislative and policy changes that improve the lives of children and youth across New Mexico.

**Jasmine\*** is a young mother who had her son while she was in foster care. She had trouble finding a stable foster home, so Jasmine asked the baby's father to keep the child for a few days. But then he refused to let Jasmine see the baby. A Pegasus lawyer represented Jasmine in the abuse/neglect case and worked with a social worker to help Jasmine find a foster home where she could live with her son. The Pegasus attorney also represented Jasmine in her custody case: she was awarded full custody of her son.



**Miguel\*** was born in Mexico and came to the U.S. as a young child. When he approached Pegasus for help, he was sixteen and living in a youth shelter. His mother was in Mexico and his father was in California, and Miguel had not lived with either of them for many years. Because he was still a minor, Miguel could not get housing on his own, and because he was undocumented he could not get medical care. A Pegasus lawyer represented Miguel in his emancipation case and worked with an immigration attorney to help Miguel address his immigration issues. The Pegasus attorney asked the judge to make specific findings in the emancipation case so that Miguel would be eligible to apply for lawful permanent resident status as a Special Immigrant Juvenile. Miguel became a permanent resident and can now get housing and medical care.



**Gaining Kinship Guardianship for their grandson Gabriel\*** wasn't easy for retired educators Sue and Bill Johnson, especially after raising one biological child and ten adopted children from all over the world.

Just as they were entering their golden years, Justin, one of their adopted children was having trouble: he called from a gas station asking for money for a motel room. Sue and Bill went and saw their 3-year-old grandson Gabriel peering out the window of the car he and his family had been living in; they knew they had to do something to help. They took Gabriel in, and they called Pegasus.

This had not been the first time Justin had called for help. Justin's relationship with his wife Carly was violent, and both had trouble with the law. Gabriel was developmentally behind by 18 months: he did not speak and was not toilet trained.

When Sue and Bill came to Pegasus, Gabriel had been with them for two years and had made great strides. Pegasus took the case and petitioned the court for Kinship Guardianship. When the Guardianship was granted, Sue and Bill were relieved to know that Gabriel would be safe.

*\*Names and some details have been changed to protect client confidentiality.*

# The Pegasus Team



**Front row (L-R):** Karina Mora, Jesuit Volunteer; Grace Spulak, Staff Attorney and Policy Coordinator; Eileen Casadevall, Senior Paralegal; Liz McGrath, Executive Director; Greg Sherman, Volunteer; Cynthia Gibbons, Office Administrator

**Back row (L-R):** Lawrence B. Kronen, Staff Attorney and Kinship Guardianship Program Director; Matthew Bernstein, Staff Attorney; Eli Kronenanker, AMERICORPS Volunteer; Jackie Sagastume, Legal Assistant

Not pictured: Tara Ford, Legal Director; Peter Klages, Legal Consultant; Ella Brown, Social Work Intern; Susan Conway, Volunteer Attorney; Barbara Mathis, Volunteer Attorney; Deborah Solove, Volunteer Attorney

## 2014 Staff News

**Ella Brown** has been working at Pegasus as a Social Work Intern, gaining experience with the connections between the legal system and social work, while contributing to cases involving grandparents and kinship guardianship as part of her studies leading to an MSW degree from New Mexico Highlands University. Ella notes that “Pegasus has a stellar reputation within the legal and social work system, and truly reflects the ethical code of social work in its legal services: respect for human dignity and a deep value for interpersonal relationships.” Through her work at Pegasus, she has joined the City of Albuquerque’s Foster Grandparent Advisory Council, and advocates for people at the specific case level up to systemic policy change. “It’s been amazing to go to court with clients, to see their frustrations and their successes, and experience at their sides the sense of dignity and relief Pegasus provides,” she says.



**Karina Mora** has been the 2014 Jesuit Volunteer at Pegasus, working as part of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps in Albuquerque after having earned an M.A. in English Literature at the University of Chicago and a B.A. in English and Political Science at UCLA. Karina helps draft pleadings, works with young parents, and assists with many cases while dealing with courts on behalf of clients and supporting Pegasus staff attorneys. “I’ve learned about the city and the economic situation of the state and its citizens,” Karina says. “Through working at Pegasus I have seen how profound some of the social and legal problems are for many children — abuse and neglect, homelessness, mental health, and much more — and how much remains to be done by providing legal services to so many people around the state.”

**Matthew Bernstein** joined Pegasus in August, 2014, as a Staff Attorney representing children in abuse/neglect and special education cases, and focusing on stopping the school-to-prison pipeline. He graduated with honors from the University of New Mexico School of Law, and has a master's degree in United States history from UNM, where his thesis focused on race relations and education. Matthew also has a Level II New Mexico teacher's license, and before attending law school taught English, history, and economics at Amy Biehl High School in downtown Albuquerque.

With Matthew's expertise in education and the law, Pegasus is now able to expand its work in special education cases for clients like Elena:



**Elena\* is thirteen and in the eighth grade.** She was adopted by her grandmother, Martha, when she was seven. Elena has been receiving special education services for the past two years. Martha recently called Pegasus because Elena has been having trouble in school: she was referred to a juvenile probation officer, and has been suspended twice. According to the school, Elena frequently leaves class without permission and recently pushed another girl. At the school's insistence, Martha has arranged for an outside behavior management specialist through her insurance. But Elena's troubles have continued.

**Pegasus filed a request for a due process hearing on behalf of the family.** After additional evaluation, it turned out that Elena has a specific learning disability in reading (dyslexia) and some sensory issues that cause her to become easily overwhelmed when someone is in her personal space. Through the mediation process, the school has agreed to provide positive behavior supports to Elena, including allowing her to leave class when she is overwhelmed provided she goes to the school counselor's office; the school is also helping her develop strategies to avoid crowded hallway situations. Now the school is taking responsibility for addressing Elena's behavior, rather than relying on an outside behavior management specialist. This is important because the school is thinking more carefully about how to support Elena. She is also now receiving targeted research-based reading instruction in a small classroom setting in addition to her regular English class.

With her new Individualized Education Plan, Elena has made great progress. She has improved a full grade level in reading, and has left the classroom twice when she felt overwhelmed but went to the counselor's office according to her behavior plan. She has had no further altercations with her classmates. And she has completed a CYFD girls group designed to work on coping strategies. She is looking forward to high school.

*\*Names and some details have been changed to protect client confidentiality.*



# Advocacy and Policy Progress

Pegasus continues to advance knowledge and practice of the law as it relates to children through training and outreach. And during the 2015 State Legislative Session, Pegasus partnered with a number of stakeholders to advance three new bills to improve wellbeing for children and youth in New Mexico.

Policy Coordinator Grace Spulak worked with former foster youth at New Mexico Child Advocacy Networks and Senator Michael Padilla to develop and draft a bill providing stronger education and transition planning for youth in foster care. The bill would also allow young people in foster care to participate in typical childhood activities like sleepovers, school trips, and summer camp programs — which foster youth are typically unable to do under current regulations.

Pegasus worked with disability advocate Katie Stone, Disability Rights New Mexico, and Senator Bill O'Neill to advance a bill to prohibit restraint and seclusion in public schools. (Currently there is no law addressing restraint and seclusion in the public school setting).

Pegasus initiated legislation, carried by Representative Gail Chasey, that would require the Public Education Department and the Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD) to share data about educational outcomes for children and youth in foster care.

Even though they did not pass this year, Pegasus and its partners enjoyed strong bi-partisan support for these bills. We will continue working on these and other issues during the next legislative session.



# Save the Date!

December 6, 2015

8th Annual Pegasus

## Jewelry Extravaganza

Supporting Legal Services for Children in New Mexico

Please join Pegasus for its annual fund-raiser to support our work on behalf of children and youth!

At the Pegasus Jewelry Extravaganza we raise money to support our work by selling fabulous new, used, vintage, and estate jewelry, generously donated by people like you. The Extravaganza is perfectly timed for the holidays and is a great family event!

Corporate and business sponsorships for the 2015 Pegasus Jewelry Extravaganza are now being accepted.

Jewelry donations can be delivered to our office. Contact Cynthia Gibbons at [cgibbons@pegasuslaw.org](mailto:cgibbons@pegasuslaw.org) for more information.

Sponsorships and jewelry donations are tax deductible and 100% of the proceeds directly support the work of Pegasus Legal Services for Children.



# Know UR Rights

Pegasus worked with Envision New Mexico and youth partners through a grant from the Con Alma Health Foundation to create educational and outreach materials for youth and healthcare providers about consent and confidentiality for children and youth 17 and under. These included special flyers and a dedicated web page called Know UR Rights.

[www.pegasuslaw.org/  
knowURrights](http://www.pegasuslaw.org/knowURrights)

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