



JUSTICE FOR A NEW GENERATION

Strengthening Constitutional rights
for children in foster care

ORGANIZATION

Gen Justice

LEADERSHIP

**Founder and CEO:
Darcy Olsen**

**Board Chair:
Celia McClelland**

ORIGIN: Darcy Olsen founded Gen Justice with her seventh foster baby in her arms. “I’d seen too much brokenness,” she said. “I had to believe there was a better way.” Olsen had just finished writing “The Right to Try,” leading a successful drive that resulted in a federal law giving people with terminal illnesses the right to try investigational medicines. “I understood hope, and I wanted to bring it to the children who needed it most,” she said.





Darcy Olsen believes that foster children are being denied fundamental rights and is pioneering a movement to remedy the injustice.

Olsen had seen a lot on her journey. “Foster care is not a Hallmark card,” she said. “The children we see have suffered the unspeakable.” One of her foster babies lived just 56 days.

In case after case, Olsen saw offenders with more rights than children. Offenders entered the courtroom with a court-appointed attorney, but the abused child entered court alone. Several times, Olsen drained her personal account to hire private attorneys for the foster children in her care, so their rights could be represented. “But rights shouldn’t depend on luck of the draw,” Olsen said. Gen Justice established a pro bono Children’s Law Clinic to stand in that gap.

Gen Justice more fully remedied the injustice last year when it created a reform giving every child in foster care the right to an attorney. Now, abused children have an attorney to advocate for their legal rights, including timely hearings, placement with siblings, and exiting the system expeditiously.

KNOWN FOR: The Gen Justice Children’s Law Clinic is the only one of its kind in Arizona providing pro bono

legal help to abused kids. Research shows that children with legal representation have better life outcomes, including getting families up to three times faster than kids without. The clinic has served as a lifeline for children, facilitating new identities and adoptions. Its motto is “New Beginnings Start Here.”

Gen Justice also helped expand Arizona’s Safe Haven law from 72 hours to 30 days. This lifesaving measure lets mothers in crisis turn to fire stations and churches without facing criminal penalties.

MOST SURPRISING THING ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION:

Pound-for-pound, the charity has an outsized impact because of its “show it, share it” strategy. Gen Justice’s work in Arizona has become a blueprint for change across the country. The organization’s primary work takes place locally, but Gen Justice shares its work freely and widely. Georgia, Louisiana and North Carolina have adopted Gen Justice reform packages, and its reforms are currently pending in Ohio and Pennsylvania.

ORGANIZATION HIGHLIGHTS:

Each year, 20,000 children go missing from foster care, and authorities are not required to search for them. That’s why children in foster care constitute the bulk of sex-trafficked children in America. Last year, Gen Justice worked with law enforcement to help stop that by ensuring that missing foster children have current pictures integrated with search and rescue systems and reported within two hours so that searches can be immediate. Gen Justice’s missing kids reform package is now in the “share it” stage as it moves across the country.



CHALLENGES DURING COVID-19:

Gen Justice had just turned 2 when the pandemic struck. Olsen said, “I opened our supporter list and started dialing. No one knew what would happen to children during lockdown, or to charitable revenue when businesses started closing. We had to ensure that we could still meet the needs of children.”



In April 2021, Governor Doug Ducey signed Gen Justice's unanimous reform, giving every abused and abandoned child in Arizona foster care legal representation.

Fortunately, people recommitted before the ask even came out. "People sacrificed a lot to ensure Gen Justice's work could continue full-force. It's a testament to the community's commitment to ending violence against kids," Olsen said. In 2020, *The Arizona Capitol Times* recognized Olsen for innovation and leadership during the pandemic.

THE FUTURE: "We've met children who've spent their

entire childhoods in foster care. 2022 is the year to bring children to families faster," Olsen said. Gen Justice wants to stop court delays and continuances at the root of children spending years in limbo. Federal law requires foster care to be temporary, but not a single state complies with those timelines. Gen Justice is shaping new court rules to restore foster care as a temporary safety for kids on their way to lasting families.

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