

## Kids First at a Glance

### Our Mission

Kids First gives children a voice in custody and divorce conflicts by providing focused legal representation and services for kids.

### Our Programs

- Legal representation for kids in high-conflict custody & divorce cases
- Workshops for children of divorcing parents
- Co-parenting mediation and neutral exchanges for separated families

### 825 Kids Served Each Year

- 200 children represented per year
- 150 children's parents participate in mediation or neutral exchanges
- 475 kids in workshops per year

### The Need/Risk

- 900 divorces involving children filed in Polk County each year
- Approx. 15% of all divorces are high-conflict
- *Children of high-conflict divorce are at great risk to fail in school, abuse drugs/alcohol, and suffer from emotional/behavioral problems*

### Kids First Clients

- Children whose parents are engaged in high-conflict custody battles
- 80% have domestic violence allegations
- Child abuse is an issue in 60% of cases

### Our Successful Outcomes

- Conflict is reduced: 84% of cases have settled without a trial in contrast to only 15% of high-conflict cases that settle nationally. Parents who settle are less likely to return to court in future & more likely to follow court order.
- Link 90% of families with needed services
- Court decrees reflect kids' wishes in >90% of cases
- Improve children's well-being and create positive family changes
- Schools report improved performance and behavior by Kids First clients

### How Can I Help?

- \$1,100 – full legal representation for a child in a divorce
- Locate in-kind office space for Kids First in Des Moines area
- Volunteer to help with fundraising, office work, leading workshops

### Budget

- \$463,000 total operating budget supports 8 employees
- 2015 revenue:
  - 42% grants
  - 20% individual donations
  - 14% corporate donations
  - 12% program fees
  - 7% silent/live auction
  - 3% civic groups/churches
  - 2% county

## **Quotes about Representation**

Linn County Judge: “I have nothing but high praise for Kids First and the service it provides to the courts and, more importantly, to children. You (collectively) have been very helpful in presenting the children's perspective to the court. Certainly, your participation has provided me with more information and often insight to make a more informed and, I hope, better decision.”

Former client, age 11: “I could talk to my lawyer about things I can't talk about with my parents.”

Former client, age 17: “You are probably one of the biggest influences in my life even though you aren't [my lawyer] anymore. You made a big difference while you were and I'm thankful for being able to have you in my life for that two year span.”

Father of child clients: “[The Kids First attorney] saved us an immeasurable amount of time, frustration and hostility—she definitely made a huge difference in being able to resolve this amicably. I can't say enough good things about the Kids First team.”

Mother of child clients: “You offered such a meaningful amount of time, substantive feedback, and helpful observations that have mattered and will continue to matter. You have been helpful to me in remaining focused on my children's well-being.”

Private attorney (opposing counsel): “Vigilant communication and common sense, a strong voice for the children. Hire more attorneys.”

## **Quotes from Parents about Co-Parenting Sessions**

“Can I just say that your meeting with us was one of the coolest, nicest, most wonderful things I've experienced in a long time? I think that was just what we needed, and I really appreciate you taking the time to do it. It went much better than our mediation sessions, and the lawyers representing the grown-ups have not gotten anything like that accomplished. I especially want to say thank you on behalf of our children, who are that much closer to having some extra peace of mind.”

“The work that you are doing is awesome, so thank you. I have worked a lot with the courts. It's truly nice to find something where the focus is on the kids because that's what matters. It's nice knowing there's an advocate for them.”

## **Quotes about Workshops**

Boy age 10: “The whole thing was cool, fun, and lets you understand divorce.”

Girl age 15: “I learned how to understand and talk with my parents better.”

Parent: “Thank you for providing this opportunity for my child to talk about divorce and hear other children's experiences.”

Parent: “[My son] was much more open to talk about what was going on and seemed to have a new level of understanding that I was previously unable to give him.”