



# TENNESSEE JUSTICE CENTER

Advocates for Families in Need

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November 2006

Dear Friend of the Tennessee Justice Center:

Ricky and Matthew's great aunt says, "Thank you".

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As toddlers, Ricky and Matthew were horribly abused by their mother's drug-addicted boyfriend. They were rescued and placed with Janice, their loving great-aunt. She knew both boys urgently needed to receive intensive mental health therapy. But the TennCare contractor and the state agencies responsible for the care of abused children consistently held that such care was not medically necessary. As the boys grew older, they began to copy the violence that they had experienced earlier. The episodes became ever more serious, and the boys were failing in school. In the face of bureaucratic intransigence, everyone Janice contacted for help seemed to regard the boys as hopeless cases and urged her to give up their custody. Finally, Janice was referred to the Tennessee Justice Center. After hundreds of hours of legal work, TJC got Ricky and Matthew the treatment that they needed. Fortunately, the help arrived in time. Years later, both boys have made dramatic turn-arounds. With justifiable love and pride, Janice reported recently that Ricky has won a two-year scholarship to community college and plans on a career helping abused children. Matthew is doing well in high school. Janice describes the two boys' success as "nothing short of a miracle".

Janice knows that miracles take teamwork. In thanking TJC for helping her save the boys from their terrible past and a frightening future, Janice wanted to make sure that her appreciation reached not just the staff who had become her friends, but the entire team that had played a part. Our passage through a complex, challenging world leaves each of us chronically indebted for the kindness of strangers. In the case of Ricky and Matthew, those strangers include the large and diverse group of generous donors, like you, who make TJC's work possible.

Janice embodies the values that inspire TJC's work. Her advocacy for Ricky and Matthew was based on faith in the sacred potential of each life. A commitment like hers is persistent and empowering, even in the face of setbacks and heartbreak. It fuels energy and creativity, encouraging the discovery of possibilities that others fail to see. And, as in Ricky and Matthew's case, it rewards our efforts when we least expect it.

Like Janice, we believe that America's promise of Equal Justice for All means that each of us matters. It means that we can't just help Ricky and Matthew but ignore the structures that wrote them off, because those structures keep on devaluing other children. Tennessee continues to rank near the bottom of the nation

in measures of the wellbeing of its children. Our poor standing is almost entirely a product of the state's failure to effectively address the needs of the one third of Tennessee children who are in low-income households. That is why it is important to hold the state and its contractors accountable for the quality of care provided to some 650,000 Tennessee children, including 15,000 foster children, who depend on TennCare to meet their medical and mental health needs. Much of TJC's work this year has been on monitoring and enforcing court orders in the *John B.* case, which requires the State to meet federal quality of care standards for children on Medicaid. As we slog through hundreds of thousands of documents and the hundreds of other tedious, tiring tasks that are required in a "mega case" like *John B.*, it is the individual victories, like Ricky and Mathew, that keep us energized by reminding us of the law's capacity to change precious lives.

Even with generous financial support, TJC would not be up to the task without the help of extraordinary volunteers. Lawyers from two of the nation's best law firms have volunteered their services to help us in the *John B.* case. Professional legal services donated to our clients by private firms exceeded \$1.7 million last year, benefiting Tennesseans of all ages.

Our indebtedness doesn't stop there. We cannot begin to put a price on the help received from respected colleagues in other advocacy organizations ranging from AARP to the Children's Defense Fund, from the Southern Poverty Law Center to the National Center for Law and Economic Justice. TJC benefited immeasurably from the energetic help of enthusiastic student interns, fundraising volunteers and selfless board members. Money could not have purchased the patient generosity of another friend who renovated our website ([www.tnjustice.org](http://www.tnjustice.org)). Another generous expert led TJC through an invaluable strategic planning process that will benefit our clients for years to come.

And so, through your support of TJC's work, you are part of a community of compassion that touches lives in sometimes miraculous ways. Your contributions affirm that America's ideals continue to matter, even if our government does not always live up to them. That point was brought home recently, when TJC obtained health care for a desperately ill child whose coverage had been erroneously terminated during last year's mass purge of TennCare enrollment. His parents fled communism in Romania in 1989, and his father supports the family as a janitor. When Michael lost coverage, the family was unable to pay for his care. They tried frantically to get help while his untreated condition deteriorated to the point that it became life-threatening. When TJC's legal intervention won the reinstatement of his health coverage, Michael's tearful father said, "You have restored my faith in America."

Thank you again for helping to make such miracles happen.

Sincerely yours,

Gordon Bonnyman  
Executive Director