Each year, Coalition for Juvenile Justice (CJJ) leaders, members and allies gather to recognize and celebrate individuals who exemplify excellence, dedication and commitment to CJJ’s core mission to reform the juvenile justice system and improve the lives of children, families and communities, nationwide. With the following awards, CJJ also hopes to inspire more people to serve their communities with distinction.
Tony Gobar Outstanding Juvenile Justice Specialist Award

“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”

- Frederick Douglass

With this award, named in honor of the late Tony Gobar, a Juvenile Justice Specialist from Mississippi, CJJ recognizes a state Juvenile Justice Specialist who exemplifies excellence in service to others; is dedicated to improving the juvenile justice system; and demonstrates compassion and concern for juveniles and advocates.

CJJ’s 2011 Tony Gobar Outstanding Juvenile Justice Specialist Award is presented to Joseph B. “Joe” Vignati of Georgia.

In the past ten years as Georgia’s Juvenile Justice Specialist, Mr. Vignati has clearly demonstrated his passion and dedication to bettering the juvenile justice system, serving as a resource to juvenile court judges throughout his state, providing technical assistance to the field, advocating for detention alternatives, and educating colleagues and the judiciary on the core protections of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA). He also serves as a leader and a voice for juvenile justice specialists across the nation, serving as their elected CJJ National Juvenile Justice Specialist.

Mr. Vignati joined the Georgia Children and Youth Coordinating Council in 2000 and has since then served as the state’s Juvenile Justice Specialist. In 2008, he was named Director of Justice Programs for the newly created Georgia Governor’s Office for Children and Families.

In 2009, Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue issued an official commendation recognizing Mr. Vignati’s ongoing contributions to the children of Georgia. Overall, Mr. Vignati has been intimately involved in all aspects of Georgia’s juvenile justice system for the past 24 years, tirelessly serving at-risk youth in a wide variety of roles, both in his career with state government and as a volunteer in community settings. He holds a bachelor’s degree in political science from Augusta College in Augusta, GA, and graduated summa cum laude in 1992 with a master’s degree in public administration from Georgia State University in Atlanta, GA.
Spirit of Youth Award

“Be the change that you want to see in the world.”
- Mohandas Gandhi

The Spirit of Youth Award is given annually by CJJ to recognize and celebrate a young adult, under the age of 28, who has made great strides after involvement with the juvenile justice system, overcome personal obstacles and is, today, making significant contributions to society. The award provides CJJ and the public with an important opportunity to learn from a young person’s direct experience about the hard work and dedication it takes to build a better life, and how juvenile justice professionals and systems can most effectively be of help. Each year, CJJ’s National Youth Committee organizes this award.

CJJ’s 2011 Spirit of Youth Award is presented to Andrew “Drew” Peterman of Idaho for his personal triumphs, professional achievements and extraordinary service to others.

Mr. Peterman is an undergraduate student at Boise State University, who will graduate with a bachelors degree in Psychology this year. He plans to further his education and pursue a graduate degree in Social Work. He comes from a loving family that resides in Boise and relishes time with his family and friends. In his free time, he enjoys writing poetry and essays.

Mr. Peterman’s journey through adolescence led him down pathways into the juvenile and adult justice systems. His essay, entitled “Tough,” bears witness to the differences of the two systems through his experience. Mr. Peterman is a shining example of the potential inside every young person, and his character and virtue demonstrate the possibilities and resiliency of the human spirit. His recipe for success includes his own integrity and motivation, finding spiritual fulfillment in God, a caring and supportive family, and a juvenile justice system invested in the principles and practices of restorative justice. In 2006, Mr. Peterman was appointed by Governor Jim Risch to the Idaho Juvenile Justice Commission (Idaho’s SAG) and is currently serving his second term. He leads the Commission’s youth committee and has made it the strongest it has ever been, as well as one of the strongest committees of the Commission overall. Idaho no longer struggles to keep youth members on the SAG thanks to Mr. Peterman’s leadership and passion. He is keenly aware of the importance of inclusion and works tirelessly to ensure voices of youth involved in the system are heard and considered. His belief that youth membership in SAGs is critically important led him to also serve on CJJ’s National Youth Committee, where he assisted in the development of the CJJ Youth Manual.

Mr. Peterman is the spirit of youth! He is courageous, passionate, and humble, and selflessly engages his talents in service to help strengthen youth and families.
A.L. Carlisle Child Advocacy Award

“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.”
- Nelson Mandela

CJJ’s A. L. Carlisle Child Advocacy Award is annually presented by CJJ to an individual who has made outstanding contributions to youth, juvenile justice improvement efforts, and in the broader area of juvenile justice and delinquency prevention. The award is named in honor of A. L. Carlisle, the founding force of the Coalition for Juvenile Justice. Ms. Carlisle was a volunteer activist who strove to ensure that the nation’s most troubled and vulnerable children would have their futures secured.

CJJ’s 2011 A.L. Carlisle Child Advocacy Award is presented to Congressman Christopher S. “Chris” Murphy (CT-5), for his work as a compassionate and committed champion for at-risk children and delinquent children and youth, as well as their families and communities.

Currently serving his third term representing CT’s 5th District, Rep. Murphy has been a tireless advocate for youth in the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems. He has led many essential legislative efforts, including drafting the first bill in the U.S. House of Representatives to reauthorize and update the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA) as well as other bills and amendments, including legislation to help youth involved with the juvenile justice system gain access to Medicaid upon release and to ensure they are not placed in juvenile justice facilities to begin with.

Rep. Murphy is devoted to educating and engaging his fellow members of Congress to address juvenile justice and delinquency prevention, and he also challenges them to personally connect with youth and families involved in the justice system in their home districts. Prior to election to the U.S. House of Representatives, he served for eight years in the Connecticut General Assembly where he wrote successful legislation to create the Office of Child Protection and change the state’s laws on status offenders. Rep. Murphy also played a key role in Connecticut’s Raise the Age campaign to increase the age of criminal court jurisdiction from 16 to 18 years, protecting youth from prosecution and incarceration in the adult criminal justice system.

Rep. Murphy grew up in Connecticut, graduated with honors from Williams College, and received his law degree from the University of Connecticut. He and his wife, Cathy Holahan, a legal aid attorney for children and families, and their son, Owen, live in Cheshire, CT.
In Memoriam

 Sadly, Shelley Erin Atkins, CJJ’s 2001 Spirit of Youth Award Recipient, passed away on August 7, 2010. She was born May 4, 1977, in Carson City, Nevada, and served as a Washoe County Juvenile Probation Officer. Shelley was known as a compassionate person who put all others above herself, whether her family or friends; human and animal alike. As a Probation Officer, Shelley provided excellent supervision to her assigned youth while adding her own special touch. Many youth would refer fondly to Shelley because she blended just the right mix of toughness with kindness.

 As a teen, Shelley was placed in mental health facilities, residential treatment and juvenile detention. Ultimately, Shelley flourished in a state-supported therapeutic group home. She left the system and began her life anew. She was honored by CJJ in 2001 for turning her life around and giving back, serving as a role model and providing loving guidance and support to many of Washoe County’s most disadvantaged children through mentoring and her work as a juvenile probation officer.

 Shelley Atkins
 1977-2010
In Memoriam

The CJJ community is heartbroken by the death of Judge B. Thomas Leahy, CJJ’s past National Chair, 2001, and our 2006 A.L. Carlisle Award recipient. He was a long-time, dedicated CJJ leader at the state, regional and national levels and a dear friend. “Judge,” as he was fondly known to us, passed away at the age of 80 on April 24, 2011, at home.

In 1969, he was appointed to the Somerset County bench and served as a Superior Court judge in Somerset and Essex counties (New Jersey) until his retirement. He was also presiding judge for the Family Division in Somerset, Hunterdon, and Warren counties.

In addition to his dedicated and visionary service with CJJ, Judge was a past president of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and of the New Jersey Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. He chaired the New Jersey SAG for more than 30 years and also served on several other committees and commissions dealing with juvenile delinquency at the state and local levels. Judge was instrumental in the development and enactment of state laws that changed the way New Jersey viewed teenagers with runaway or truancy behaviors and/or family conflict, to prevent them from being charged as status offenders or delinquents, and instead ensured a supportive intervention through Family Crisis Intervention Units.

In the evenings following long meeting days, Judge Leahy would frequently hold court surrounded by his many CJJ friends. He was a great storyteller and had a wonderful sense of humor. It was a rare occasion that Judge would let an evening pass without a toast to “my bride” (Mary), the joy and center of his being.

Judge’s favorite Irish blessing:

*May the road rise up to meet you; may the wind be always at your back. May the sun shine warm upon your face, the rains fall soft upon your fields; And until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of his hand.*