



(Photo by Michael Garrett)

Barbara Elias-Perciful, Director of Texas Lawyers for Children, Receives National Child Advocacy Award

Dallas attorney and child advocate Barbara Elias-Perciful was honored by the American Bar Association's Young Lawyers Division as the Distinguished Lawyer recipient of the 2009 Child Advocacy Award for her service on behalf of abused and neglected children. This prestigious award is based on an individual's personal achievements and impact in helping abused and neglected children. Ms. Elias-Perciful was honored in a ceremony during the ABA's annual meeting in Chicago this August. She was introduced by Ms. Jennifer Morris, a partner in the Dallas law firm of Carrington, Coleman, Sloman & Blumenthal, L.L.P., who presently serves as the President-Elect of the Texas Young Lawyers Association.

Ms. Elias-Perciful is an alumna of the Southern Methodist University School of Law, where she graduated second in her class. In 1993, she was working at Carrington, Coleman, Sloman & Blumenthal, L.L.P., in Dallas when she was appointed as an attorney ad litem for a little girl who had been sexually abused by her father. Barbara saw the vast disparity in resources, training, and mentoring available to child advocacy lawyers as compared to commercial lawyers. She realized that this translated to children not always getting the case outcomes that they deserved and that they needed. Barbara felt compelled to quit her job at the law firm and began a private practice focused exclusively on abused and neglected children. The more she learned about the overburdened system

charged with protecting children and the lack of resources available to the dedicated judges and attorneys handling their cases, the more determined she became to devote her career to doing all she could to improve the system for handling child abuse cases. For more than seventeen years, she has developed innovative methods for providing information to the legal professionals involved in abused children's cases.

Ms. Elias-Perciful is the President of Texas Loves Children, Inc. ("TLC"), a nonprofit organization whose major project, Texas Lawyers for Children, created and operates a unique Online Legal Resource and Communication Center, which provides a comprehensive child abuse law library; secure communication tools allowing judges and attorneys to discuss best practices and share expertise; and a statewide pro bono attorney network. This Online Center is the first of its kind in the nation and serves almost 1,400 judges and attorneys in Texas, who handle the cases of over 36,500 children annually. Judges and attorneys who use this center have found it to be invaluable. In the words of one attorney, "The TLC Website helped me identify topics that I had not yet thought about—so that I could effectively represent my client and protect her... TLC has made a difference in my practice and my client's life." This innovative Online Center has been recognized by the Texas Supreme Court's Commission for Children, Youth, and Families as an integral component in Texas' statewide response to the problem of child abuse and neglect. TLC receives funding from generous individuals, the Amon G. Carter Foundation, The Meadows Foundation, the Harold Simmons Foundation, and the Texas Supreme Court's Texas Court Improvement Program.



Ms. Elias-Perciful's impact on improving the handling of abused children's cases is not limited to Texas, as TLC has now created an Online Center for the state of California. Additionally, this year TLC launched Improving Outcomes, a national campaign to promote sharing expertise in the handling of child abuse cases, through which Barbara provides consultation to other states and organizations interested in creating methods for sharing best practice information across a state's child welfare community.

Locally, Barbara represents abused and neglected children as their court-appointed attorney and/or guardian ad litem. She serves as the Chair of the Texas State Bar Committee on Child Abuse and

Neglect and is a member of the Collaborative Council for the Texas Supreme Court's Commission for Children, Youth and Families. She is frequently a speaker at local, state, and national events on a range of topics involved in handling child abuse and neglect cases. Barbara's vision is that, with sufficient funding, TLC can continue to enhance the Texas Online Center and continue its expansion to other states to help as many abused and neglected children as possible.

The Child Advocacy Award was established in 1990 by the American Bar Association's Young Lawyers Division in conjunction with the ABA's Center on Children and the Law to honor lawyers for distinguished service on behalf of children. The award celebrates the often unheralded service that child advocates bring to children and the legal profession. To learn more about how you can help Texas Loves Children in its efforts to help abused children, visit www.TexasLovesChildren.org.