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Stephanie Villafuerte Cycles Hundreds of Miles to Raise Money for Abused and Neglected Children by [Jennifer Orton](#)

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Judaism of the Foothills held the first of a nine- part lecture series featuring a number of high profile speakers including Stephanie Villafuerte, Executive Director of the Rocky Mountain Children's Law Center. Villafuerte, a 20- year- professional child advocate kicked off the series with a lecture called Helping Abused and Neglect Children: When Good Public Policy and Politics Collide. Villafuerte is a former criminal prosecutor who specialized for many years in child physical and sexual abuse cases. She currently runs the Rocky Mountain Children's Law Center which protects abused and neglected children in the child welfare system. Stephanie Villafuerte talked about what happens when a report of child abuse is made. Villafuerte said, "when a child abuse report is made the case can go one of two ways." "First, a case can be filed in criminal court where the offender can be punished for their actions. Secondly, a case can also be filed by the department of human services. In this instance it is the department who brings the case and it is the civil juvenile courts which ultimately process it." Villafuerte said, "it is important to understand the differences between these two processes. The criminal courts are designed to deter future crime and punish an offender. The purpose of the child protection system, on the other hand, is to make families healthy again so that their children can live safely with them even after they have suffered abuse or neglect at the hands of their caretakers." Stephanie Villafuerte went on to explain that in Colorado the criminal justice system handles approximately 10% of the total number of child abuse cases in the state while the child protection system deals with the other 90% of the cases. Villafuerte stated, "the public's perception of what constitutes child abuse is often associated with the criminal courts. These cases are high profile and often gain a great deal of attention. The public knows far less about the children who are in the child protection system even though they comprise the greatest number of child victims." "While the purpose of the child protection system is to protect children from abuse and neglect it is filled with competing viewpoints. Villafuerte explained, "there are a number of tensions within the child protection system. There are parents right advocates who believe that the state enters the lives of families more than it should and that families should be allowed to raise their children without state interference." "On the other hand there are child right advocates who believe that children should be given more say in their own lives especially when it comes to whether a child wants to be reunified with their family after an incident or pattern of abuse." These viewpoints impact a number of policy decisions made on behalf of children by lawyers, judges, and government officials every day. Villafuerte stated, "Our goal at the Children's Law Center is to bring attention to the high number of children who are involved in the child protection system. She stated, "It is important for the public to understand that there are 12,000 Colorado children who are living out of their homes because they have been abused or neglected. These children are spending their childhoods waiting for the child protection system to make their homes safe again or if this cannot happen to find them a new home altogether. In the meantime, these children are growing up in foster care and group homes without the stability they need. Our goal is to create awareness around this group of children so that the entire community can work towards creating better childhoods for them all."

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Jennifer Orton is an avid writer who writes on a variety of topics including, but not limited to Stephanie Villafuerte. She has written many popular articles. She also does research work for various companies and people.

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