



# MAC'S 40TH ANNIVERSARY

## Award Presentation to Marian Wright Edelman by Hubie Jones at MAC 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Celebration

There is no one on the national stage more synonymous with child advocacy than our first honoree, Marian Wright Edelman. The founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund, she has become the nation's conscience on children's issues, while her organization has set the standard for hard-hitting policy analysis and concrete legislative victories. Her mastery of advocacy strategies is legion, from building grassroots movements state by state to moving effectively in the corridors of power wielding the most effective tools an advocacy organization can possess: personal integrity and the time-tested credibility of a highly professional and skilled staff.

By the time Marion's path crossed MAC's in the early 1970s, she was already established as a powerful force in the civil rights movement. She directed the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund office in Jackson, Mississippi in 1963 and became the first black woman admitted to the Mississippi Bar. In 1965, she helped start and, with our own John Mudd, managed the largest single-purpose Head Start program in the nation, serving over 12,000 children in 120 communities throughout the state. In 1968, she moved to Washington, D.C., as counsel for the [Poor People's Campaign](#) that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. began organizing before his death. Marian founded the [Washington Research Project](#), a public interest law firm and the parent body of the Children's Defense Fund, and for two years directed the Center for Law and Education at Harvard University where she first encountered MAC.

Impressed with the critically important issue of school exclusion identified by MAC's first report and the impact it had in Massachusetts, she took this kind of analysis and advocacy to a national scale in writing the first report of the Children's Defense Fund on the two million children excluded from school, entitled, *Children Out of School in America*, published in 1974. And as MAC's report led to the first state special education law in the nation, her report contributed to the first federal law in 1975, P.L. 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children.

Even prior to that monumental legislative victory, the Children's Defense Fund had exposed the horrific conditions of juvenile jails, helping to lead to the passage in 1974 of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. Over the years, the Children's Defense Fund had its hand in just about every aspect of federal children's legislative initiatives and budget battles, from child care to adoption, Head Start to health care. Its annual Children's Budgets in the early years of the Reagan budget cuts served as the rallying point to stop the loss of vital federal funds to programs for children throughout the country.

Marian Wright Edelman was recognized with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2000 by Bill Clinton for her tireless advocacy on behalf of children, and today, with national and regional offices around the country, the Children's Defense Fund is leading the fight for national health reform on behalf of children, while it also presses forward on a myriad of issues, including education reform, child care, child welfare, juvenile justice and youth development and leadership.

It is my great pleasure to award my friend and our national treasure, Marian Wright Edelman, with an award at MAC's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration for her extraordinary advocacy on behalf of our nation's children.