



2022 – 23 Annual Program Summary



Our Mission

When children are in crisis, the biggest decisions in their lives are often made for them, without their input. At Lawyers For Children, our mission is to give children in foster care, youth justice, child custody and other family court proceedings a voice in the decisions that will change their lives. Since LFC's founding in 1984, our attorneys and social workers have been listening to their clients, protecting their legal rights, and empowering them with the tools and resources they need to grow and thrive.

Each year, our staff of over [60 professionals](#) represents over 3,000 individual children in more than 6,000 court proceedings. Our advocacy helps children be in safe and loving homes, expedites return to families, and helps minimize the trauma of being out of home. We also help youth aging out of foster care access the education, housing, and employment they need to transition to independence.

We are continuously evolving our practice with special projects that focus on the most vulnerable among our clients, including LGBTQ+ youth, children with special educational needs, youth who have experienced sexual abuse and exploitation, and young people with immigration issues. Our public policy project tracks recurring challenges for young people across all of our individual cases and uses this data to promote comprehensive reform of the foster care system through both legislative advocacy and class action litigation.

At Lawyers For Children, we are incredibly proud of our [award-winning](#) interdisciplinary advocacy model, but our clients say that what makes us so special to them is how we make them feel. We make sure that the children and young people we represent know that they are never alone as they face the challenges of foster care.

Our Programs & Services

At Lawyers For Children, a lawyer and social worker, both with extensive experience and training, work together on every case. In addition, LFC is the only children's law office in the country to employ two full-time Youth Advocates (young adults who have successfully aged out of foster care) to provide additional support for older clients. Each LFC team is thus comprised of individuals with expertise in both the law and the full range of existing services available to ensure a successful future for every one of our young clients.

Since 1984, we have represented almost 30,000 children in New York City court proceedings involving: voluntary foster care placement, abuse, neglect, termination of parental rights, adoption, guardianship, youth justice, paternity, custody and visitation.

We listen carefully to our clients, help them understand their options and vigorously protect their right to a safe, secure and supportive place to call home. For some clients, this means returning to live safely with their families. For others, it means speeding up the adoption process. For many of our clients who are over 18, the goal is to set out on their own with the knowledge and support necessary to establish stable housing, obtain jobs and embark on successful careers of their own.

In addition to our pioneering interdisciplinary approach to individual representation, LFC also works to achieve systemic change on behalf of all children in foster care.

LFC also offers specialized services for high-risk children in foster care. More information about our special projects can be found here:

[Public Policy & Special Litigation](#)

[LGBTQIA+](#)

[Aging Out](#)

[Sex Abuse & Trafficking](#)

[Immigration](#)

[Domestic Violence](#)

[Mental Health & Developmental Disability](#)

[Education](#)

[Youth Justice](#)

Featured Client: Angelique – From Foster Care to College



Angelique* was abused by her parents for years before she was placed into foster care when she was twelve. She lived in five foster homes in her first year in care, but when LFC was assigned to her case, her LFC social worker met with her and found out that she had a cousin who was willing to take her into her home.

Living in a stable home enabled Angelique to focus on her studies. She worked hard and planned to attend college outside of New York City when she graduated from high school. When she asked her foster care agency for help filling out her scholarship application and gathering the materials she would need, they told her that she should attend community college instead. Angelique called her LFC social worker, who supported her dream of attending a four-year college. She helped Angelique with her applications and even wrote a letter of recommendation for her. A few months before Angelique graduated from high school, she found out she had been admitted to Syracuse University. She began college in the fall and comes to visit her LFC team every time she has a school break.

Unwavering Advocacy During COVID-19

The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and its harmful economic impact continues to place additional challenges on our clients, who are among New York City's most vulnerable. And while the city has opened, this too puts a strain on our workload. LFC is being assigned to an enormous backlog of cases that hadn't been heard since the onset of the pandemic, as well as new cases and litigation to address crises that were left unaddressed during COVID.



Lawyers For Children remains committed to providing representation and protection to our clients as we face the fallout from this crisis. Our tireless advocacy continues both in-person and virtually as we have adapted to meet the pressing needs of the young people we serve by:

- Helping our clients to access needed educational, mental health, and reproductive services
- Pursuing successful efforts to prevent incarceration and homelessness
- Increasing economic security through job readiness training and employment opportunities
- Supporting our clients with basic necessities and financial assistance as they transition to independent living
- Advocating for systemic change across the child welfare system, benefitting not only our clients but all vulnerable youth in New York State.

Sadly, many young people in New York have dealt with the loss of a parent from COVID-19, including several of our clients, who were featured in a [New York Times](#) article on the issue. Those clients include brothers EJ and Kasaun, who lost their mother to COVID. Threatened with separation, Kasaun, just 22, took custody of his 16 year old brother with special needs. With the help of our donors and LFC's advocacy, over \$30,000 were raised to help the brothers, and they moved into a new apartment together this past spring.

4. Systemic Reform

In addition to direct representation of individual children, LFC is also proud to fight on the systemic level to change the larger child welfare system to benefit the lives of all children in foster care through class action lawsuits, collaboration with agency officials, and legislative reform.

LFC is currently spearheading a [lawsuit](#) opposing the effort to establish a shadow foster care system in New York City. Other examples of LFC's landmark systemic reform accomplishments include:

- **Ending Foster Youth Homelessness:** Through our class action lawsuit filed in 2011, *D.B. v. Richter*, LFC effectively stopped the NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS) from discharging youth from foster care to homelessness. Following a nationally recognized court-ordered settlement, no young person leaving care can be discharged to homelessness or discharged without stable income or meaningful adult connections in the community. LFC also pioneered the strategy of requiring ACS to *extend* a young person's time in foster care, beyond age 21, whenever the youth wants and needs continued support to achieve housing, stable healthcare, a secure income and other services they may need to succeed on their own.
- **Legislative Advocacy:** LFC's advocacy efforts contributed to the passage of several bills in the state legislature that will protect the rights and improve the lives of older youth. One major victory was the prohibition of handcuffs in Family Court. The indiscriminate use of shackling by court officers had long presented a challenge to the basic rights of young people appearing in family court. Another crucial victory for older youth was the expansion of foster care re-entry. The passage of this bill provides youth who left foster care at any time after age 16 with the option to return to care, providing a much-needed safeguard against homelessness. Finally, the

legislature passed the long-awaited Preserving Family Bonds bill which, if signed by the governor, will grant judges the discretion to allow post-termination visitation with families of origin if it is determined to be in the youth’s best interest. Since most youth adopted out of foster care are teenagers, this legislation will be especially important to older youth, who often desire to maintain a connection to their birth families.

- Residential Treatment Center Reform:** LFC continued our collaboration with the Legal Aid Society to improve conditions for youth and end the use of prone restraints at Residential Treatment Centers. After the tragic and unnecessary death in May 2020 of Cornelius Fredericks, a sixteen-year-old who was subjected to a prone restraint at a congregate care facility in Michigan, LFC redoubled its efforts to ban this practice, including a letter to Governor Cuomo and OCFS Commissioner Poole advocating the immediate ban of prone restraints in all foster care facilities in New York. In November 2020, OCFS announced they would move to fully ban face-down (prone) restraints on children in foster care and acknowledged that the public response from advocates against prone restraints greatly factored into their decision to issue this policy change.

Income & Expenses for Fiscal Year Ended March 31, 2023

Total Support & Revenue	\$9,146,283
Total Expenses	\$9,620,609
Net Assets at Beginning of Year	\$2,664,297
Program Expenses	\$8,832,413
Management & Administrative	\$938,058
Fundraising	\$376,597
Total Net Assets	\$2,183,881

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