LawyersForChildren
Protecting Rights. Changing Lives.

2025-26 Annual Program Summary



Our Mission

When children are in crisis, Lawyers For Children is at their side to provide protection, support and hope. We offer free legal and social work advocacy to children in New York City placed into foster care as well as unaccompanied immigrant youth, and children who are the subject of abuse, neglect, youth justice, termination of parental rights, custody, guardianship, visitation, adoption, and related proceedings — ensuring that every young person we represent finds the love, safety, and true sense of family that they need.

Since 1984, the attorneys and social workers at Lawyers For Children have been transforming the hopes of children in family court proceedings into reality by providing critically needed, top-quality legal representation and social work services. We represent children from birth to age 25 and provide support and social work services for clients who transition out of foster care and for whom cases are closed in the courts. The vast majority of our clients are children from low-income families and communities of color.

Lawyers For Children gives our clients the representation and resources they deserve — a voice in the decisions that affect them, guidance in evaluating their options, and support for the next steps in their lives. By advocating, educating, and empowering, we not only dramatically improve the lives of our clients, but we compel comprehensive reform of the foster care system as a whole.

Watch a video produced by Academy Award-winning filmmaker Vanessa Roth for LFC's 40th Anniversary.

Our Work

1. Individual Advocacy – An Interdisciplinary Approach

LFC's interdisciplinary model includes assigning an attorney/social worker team to advocate on behalf of every child we represent. Additionally, LFC has pioneered the Youth Advocate model, which employs two full-time youth advocates who have been in foster care themselves to help older youth navigate the foster care system and successfully transition out of care. Each LFC team comprises 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 over **100,000** children in New York City court proceedings involving voluntary foster care placement, abuse, neglect, termination of parental rights, adoption, youth justice, guardianship, 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 their adoption or, for many of our clients who are over 18, setting out on their own with the knowledge and support necessary to establish homes, obtain jobs, and embark on successful careers of their own.

Featured client: Ana



When Ana was 16-years-old, she lost her mother to organ failure. Desperately needing stability after her traumatic loss, Ana went to live with her older sister, but soon experienced abuse and yet another loss when Ana realized her sister "just didn't want me any more." Child protective services quickly placed Ana in a group home. When LFC was assigned to represent her, Ana was terrified that she would spend the rest of her days living in an institution. Ana's attorney and social worker immediately asked Ana where she would feel safe and supported. Ana identified her best friend's home as a loving and supportive refuge and LFC went to work to ensure the home was certified as her foster home. In her new home, Ana felt loved and secure.

With the help and guidance of LFC's youth advocates (youth with lived experience in foster care), Ana successfully navigated the transition from foster care to independence. Ana obtained a graduate degree in social work so that she could advocate for others. Ana explains, "LFC is an amazing organization – they really do care and want you to succeed. And, they make you feel like you are never alone. LFC is like a family."

2. Holistic Support & Special Projects

Over the years, LFC has added Special Projects to our programmatic portfolio to serve high-risk youth and address recurrent and complex issues including Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation, Immigration, Mental Health, Domestic Violence, Education Advocacy, LGBTQ Rights, Public Policy & Special Litigation, and Adolescents Confronting Transition. In addition, Lawyers For Children has launched a Youth Justice Project which represents young people in juvenile delinquency proceedings in Family Court.

Our largest special project is the **Adolescents Confronting Transition Project (ACT**), which focuses on clients ages 16-25+ who are preparing to transition or have recently transitioned out of foster care without any family to support them. The project staff is comprised of two attorneys, two social workers, and two youth advocates, all of whom offer highly targeted, individualized, holistic advocacy to fill critical gaps in services to help our clients graduate from high school, attend college, find safe and affordable housing, secure the basic items they need to live independently, have a reliable source of income, and identify an adult resource in the community to count on for a variety of personal challenges that can impact their emotional and physical stability.

Our **Immigration Rights Project** has been especially challenged over the past few years. This project identifies youth at risk and provides immigration services to undocumented clients including obtaining the family court orders necessary to prepare filings for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). SIJS status is available to undocumented youth in foster care or guardianship proceedings who have been neglected or abandoned by their families. To meet the needs of immigrant youth, LFC recently expanded its practice to include two new fellows who serve as Shapiro Fellows for the Protection of Children's Rights.

While LFC vigorously advocates for everything a child needs to be safe, healthy, and successful in court, thanks to the support of our funders and donors, we routinely step in through our **special discretionary fund** in order to fill the gaps that the government fails to address, such as making sure a client has a professional outfit for a job interview, a train ticket to spend the holidays with a relative in a neighboring state, textbooks for college, or a simple gift for their birthday or to acknowledge a life milestone.

One of the newest LFC practice areas is youth justice, which represents young people in juvenile delinquency proceedings. LFC's **Youth Justice Practice** consists of attorneys and social workers who zealously represent our clients in juvenile delinquency proceedings

before New York City's Family Court. LFC's holistic legal representation and social services help ensure that the wide range of issues that impact justice-involved youth are addressed. These may include access to mental health services, confronting educational challenges, and mitigating internal family conflict. For clients involved in both the foster care and youth justice system, LFC provides representation on both matters, minimizing the disruption of having multiple providers.

The Youth Justice Practice also works to reform laws and policies that criminalize and stigmatize youth and promotes alternatives that protect the rights of youth and encourage their constructive future engagement with their communities.

3. Systemic Advocacy & Impact

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 children involved in family court, as well as child welfare and youth justice systems through class action lawsuits, collaboration with agency officials, policy work, and legislative reform.

- **Protecting Foster Youth's Social Security Benefits:** LFC helped advance a major shift in New York City's approach to Social Security benefits belonging to children in foster care. Following advocacy by LFC and other children's advocates, ACS announced that it would stop using children's benefits to reimburse itself for the cost of their care and instead preserve funds for their futures. These benefits can provide a critical financial foundation for young people leaving foster care, helping them pay for housing, education, and other essentials. LFC has continued to press for stronger protections so that eligible children, including those with disabilities, can receive, retain, and use the benefits to which they are entitled.
- **Challenging Shadow Foster Care:** LFC, together with the Legal Aid Society and the Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo, and represented by pro bono counsel from Proskauer Rose, secured a unanimous victory in New York's highest court striking down the State's Host Family Home program. The program would have allowed children to live apart from their families without the legal representation and court oversight required under New York's foster care laws. The Court of Appeals held that the State lacked authority to create a parallel system that bypassed these critical protections. This victory safeguards children's right to counsel and preserves essential oversight and accountability when families face separation.
- **Advocating for Stronger Family Courts:** LFC continued to advocate for the resources necessary to ensure that children and families receive meaningful access to justice in New York's Family Courts. Responding to Chief Judge Rowan D. Wilson's call for greater investment, LFC urged the Governor and Legislature to fund both the courts and the attorneys who represent the children and families appearing before them. Increasing judicial resources must be accompanied by adequate support for legal representation. LFC's advocacy challenges a two-tier system of justice that disproportionately affects Black and Brown children and families and presses for funding that reflects the importance of the decisions made in Family Court.

Income and Expenses for Fiscal Year Ended March 31, 2026

Total Support & Revenue	**$13,279,948**
Total Expenses	**$12,269,864**
Program Expenses	$10,517,151
Management and General	$1,142,301
Fundraising	$610,412
Total Net Assets	**$4,330,579**

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