

At the Child's Side

Lawyers For Children

Issue No. 15

"Unwavering advocacy for children in foster care since 1984"

Executive Director's Message

Last month, when the New York State Court of Appeals upheld Lawyers For Children's position in a complex child welfare case, we helped to make new law. This decision secured every child's right to be free from unnecessary separation from a parent in the absence of any evidence that the parent poses a risk of imminent harm.

That same day, we also made certain that an eighth grader's school fees were paid so that he could attend his middle school graduation in a cap and gown, just like the rest of his classmates.

LFC continues to catalyze system-wide change while attending to the smaller details that help every one of our clients in foster care know that we are always listening and responding to what is important to them. After twenty-seven years, LFC remains true to our mission to ensure safety and legal protection for all of our clients while simultaneously improving the system for every child in foster care.

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This newsletter allows us to share the groundbreaking impact that our supporters' generosity and staff's dedication have on the lives of the thousands of children we represent throughout the year. From advocacy in the highest courts to individual successes for our city's most vulnerable children, we are proud to count 2010-11 as a year of tremendous achievement and progress for Lawyers For Children.

Thank you for being a part of our effort to ensure that children in foster care receive the unparalleled advocacy and support that they deserve.

Karen Freedman, *Executive Director*



Mental Health Advocacy Project Enables Child to Return Home Safely

When Ashley* was seven years old, she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Although Ashley's parents sought help at every turn, they were unable to access the resources they needed to cope with their daughter's mental illness. After several psychiatric hospitalizations, they placed Ashley into foster care, hoping that there, she would finally get the help she needed. She was placed in a short-term diagnostic center, where she was supposed to be assessed and sent to live temporarily in a therapeutic foster home. Ashley desperately wanted to return home and her

Continued on pg. 2



*In order to preserve client confidentiality, names and other details have been changed. Volunteer models appear in all photographs that depict LFC clients. These photos are courtesy of Ben Fink Shapiro Studio.

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(Mental Health Advocacy Project Enables Child to Return Home Safely continued from pg. 1)

parents wanted her back as soon as possible. However, when Ashley was referred to LFC's Mental Health Advocacy Project, her LFC social worker discovered that Ashley had been waiting at the diagnostic center for two months because the foster care agency had not located a placement for her.

Ashley's social worker assessed Ashley and her parents and compiled a list of in-home and community-based services that would allow her to safely return to her parents. Ashley's attorney secured a court order ensuring that these services were put in place immediately, and within a week she was able to return home. Ashley's parents now have the help they need, and as a result, Ashley is flourishing at home.



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DR. ANDREA MARKS

Board Member Andrea Marks, MD, Reflects on Serving the Whole Child

Dr. Andrea Marks founded Adolescent-Young Adult Medicine, a private medical practice for 9-30 year olds, 21 years ago, and is on the faculty and medical staff of The Mount Sinai Medical Center. She has been a member of Lawyers for Children's Board of Directors for the past 11 years. Dr. Marks initially became involved with LFC when she learned about the organization's innovative interdisciplinary approach. She says that she was also impressed by "how deeply LFC leader-



"It is always a joy for me to be part of a group which naturally thinks about the whole child and sees their needs within the broader context of their world."



ship and staff seemed to care for these young people, and not just represent them." Dr. Marks says that her integrated practice at Adolescent-Young Adult Medicine is guided by the same philosophy: "We recognize that the health of our patients is influenced by numerous factors that we try to understand and to address, and not just to treat disease."

LFC's Executive Director, Karen Freedman, says that Dr. Marks has not only brought a great deal of compassion and wisdom to her work on LFC's board, but has also served as a valuable resource on complex medical cases. Dr. Marks says, "It is always a joy for me to have a chance to lend my medical expertise to Board discussions, but mostly to be part of a group which naturally thinks about the whole child and sees their needs within the broader context of their world."

Social Worker Reaches Out to Pregnant and Parenting Teens

LFC social worker Mary Ellen Shea has worked with youth in foster care for the past 11 years. This year, Mary Ellen began consulting on all of LFC's cases that involve pregnant or parenting youth.

Teen parenting is always difficult, but it can be especially complicated for youth in foster care. Mary Ellen assists our clients in accessing services that help them prepare to become parents, care for their children, and plan for life after foster care. She reaches out to these clients regularly with information about health care resources, housing programs for youth in foster care with their own children, and other services. Over the next several months, Mary Ellen plans to form an advocacy group for pregnant and parenting teens, where she will facilitate the sharing of information and invite guest speakers.

Mary Ellen is working with Anna Schissel, an LFC staff attorney, to create a handbook and resource guide for pregnant and parenting teens. They also plan to begin visiting foster care residences for mothers and children to share information about the rights of young parents who are in foster care.

In addition, Mary Ellen has opened LFC's "Baby Boutique," a collection of donated baby clothing, books, blankets, and other supplies, to provide clients with the basics for their babies and toddlers. She has also begun collecting maternity clothing for pregnant clients. If you would like to make a contribution to the Baby Boutique or to the maternity clothing drive, please contact Mary Ellen Shea at mshea@lawyersforchildren.org.



MARY ELLEN SHEA, LMSW
PREGNANT AND PARENTING
TEEN SPECIALIST



Teen parenting is always difficult, but it can be especially complicated for youth in foster care.





LFC Spearheads Model Court for Youth Aging Out of Care

To address the long-standing need for more intensive planning and coordination of services for youth who are preparing to age out of foster care, Lawyers For Children spearheaded the creation of an innovative new model part in Manhattan Family Court, called the Transition Planning Court. The model part, which launched in late May, is among the first in the nation to specialize in the complex issues facing youth who are 16 and older. The Transition Planning Court will engage young people as never before in planning for the time when they will age out of foster care to live on their own.

Retired Family Court Judge Bryanne Hamill, who served on the Family Court bench for 10 years, has returned to the court system to act as the dedicated Judicial Hearing Officer for the new Transition Planning Court. With the active involvement of each young person and his or her attorney and caseworkers, Judge Hamill will review and rule on the individualized plan for each young person as he/she prepares to leave foster care. Through frequent Benchmark Transition hearings, Judge Hamill will monitor the city’s provision of services and ensure that young adults aging out of care are properly equipped to make this critical life transition.

This new way for the court to interact with youth aging out of foster care was initially inspired by input from Lawyers For Children’s Youth Advisory Board, a group of current and former

LFC Gears Up for Second Annual Items for Independence Drive

Lawyers For Children is organizing its second annual drive to collect household essentials for youth who are “aging out” of foster care. Young people who are aging out of foster care are those who were never able to reunite with their families or find a permanent adoptive home, and as a result remain in foster care until they reach the age of 21. Most of these young people do not have anyone to help them with their transition to independent living and are entering adulthood without a safety net.

The items collected in the drive are sorted into packages, which include kitchen supplies, organizational items, and decorations such as lamps and picture frames. This year, we hope to have enough packages available to give to each client who secures his/her first apartment. If you would like to contribute to this effort by making a donation, please contact Lauren Kernan at lkernan@lawyersforchildren.org.

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LFC clients who are 18 and older. The members of the Youth Advisory Board will provide us with their feedback and ideas as we continue to refine the model court process. It is our hope that the Manhattan model court will eventually create a new paradigm for engaging youth in judicial decision-making throughout the city, state and country.

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Lady Gaga Awards \$100,000 to Lawyers For Children



Lady Gaga and the Robin Hood Foundation recently teamed up to support New York City nonprofits serving LGBTQ and disconnected youth. Lawyers For Children was honored to be selected as one of just five organizations to participate in the campaign. In the process we created new videos, launched a Causes page, gained over 1,000 new supporters, and ultimately, were awarded \$100,000. Visit our Causes page at www.causes.com/lfc to see our videos and learn more about Lawyers For Children.

LFC Welcomes 2011 Summer Interns



Each summer, LFC offers an intensive internship opportunity to highly qualified law students and college students. Through LFC's internship program, students develop an understanding of the child welfare system in New York City and the vital role that our interdisciplinary teams play in effectively representing children. We are proud of the broad range of experiences that our extraordinary interns bring to their work at LFC, and we thank them for sharing their many talents with us and with the children we represent.

Legal Interns

Orly Bertel
Hofstra Law School

Jaclyn D'Arminio
Cardozo School of Law

Sophie DeLaCour
Richardson School of Law

Kira Ewig
Brooklyn Law School

Tara Garlinghouse
University of Pennsylvania Law School

Kathryn Gillespie
Columbia Law School

Julie Ann Howe
NYU School of Law

Lindsay Miller
NYU School of Law

Tara Sheoran
Cardozo School of Law

Mara Wishingrad
Fordham University School of Law

Social Work Interns

Christine Call
Princeton University

Nomi Conway
Amherst College

Sara Cullen
Cornell University

Kristen Henlin
Boston University

David Jacobs
Brown University

Natalie Klein
University of Michigan

Carly Lenhoff
Brandeis University

Sasha Mack
Cornell University

Beth Pearl-Barr
Washington University in St. Louis

Luis Ramos
Princeton University

Nina Rodriguez
University of Essex

Aliza Sir
UNC Chapel Hill

Shadman Zaman
Harvard University

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