Executive Director’s Message

The past year has been a time of great achievement for LFC, from victories in court on behalf of individual clients to large-scale accomplishments in the field of child welfare legislation. LFC supported the implementation of key legislation to ensure that young people between the ages of 18 and 21 can return to foster care if they find themselves homeless or unsafe after leaving care. We fought for greater use of the new Kinship Guardianship Assistance Act, which provides financial assistance when it is needed to enable relatives to take children out of foster care and provide them with a stable family home. Members of our Policy Project traveled to Albany during budget sessions to provide information to legislators about critical funding initiatives affecting children in care, and LFC recently settled a class action lawsuit on behalf of our clients that will ensure that young people no longer age out of foster care to homelessness.

LFC’s impact is felt in the lives of our clients and their families on a daily basis, as we fight to find safe, loving homes for all children in foster care. In the past year, we have advocated for countless family reunifications, adoptions, and safe, affirming placements with foster families. Our social workers and attorneys frequently receive thank you cards and updates from clients saying how LFC has changed their lives.

I am so proud to be at the helm of an organization that is both deeply appreciated by our clients and their families and recognized by the child advocacy community. In fact, in just the past month, LFC’s commitment to children has been recognized with national, state and local awards for outstanding service to children in foster care.

This newsletter details these and other achievements, none of which would have been possible without your support. Thank you for being a partner in our effort to ensure that children in foster care receive the advocacy they need and deserve.

Karen Freedman, Executive Director
**Lawyers For Children Establishes New In-House Appellate Practice**

We are delighted to announce that Shirim Nothenberg will be joining Lawyers For Children as our first ever Senior Staff Attorney for Appeals. Shirim graduated from Columbia University School of Law and went on to clerk in the U.S. District Court, Southern District of New York. Her work experience includes Legal Aid’s Juvenile Rights Practice, Morningside Heights Legal Services, and Advocates For Children. For the past fourteen years, Shirim has been drafting class action complaints and arguing federal appeals at Children’s Rights, Inc. As the attorney who will coordinate LFC’s in-house appellate practice and pro bono partnerships, Shirim will also carry a discrete family court caseload to maintain contact with the clients and legal issues in our direct service litigation practice. Creating a position dedicated to managing our appellate work represents LFC’s commitment to continuously pursuing new ways to more effectively and efficiently serve our clients.

**New Handbooks Educate Clients About Their Rights**

LFC’s Mental Health Advocacy Project has created and produced a new handbook for youth in foster care who are dealing with mental health concerns. In addition, new handbooks are in production that focus on the legal rights of pregnant and parenting teens in foster care and the general educational rights of youth in foster care. These handbooks are the latest additions to Lawyers For Children’s You Are Not Alone series, which informs our clients about their rights in foster care, the places they can go to get help, and the resources that are available to them. We are proud to provide our clients with both in- and out-of-courtroom, including handbooks that provide them with tools to advocate more effectively for themselves.

**We are proud to provide our clients with services both in and out of the courtroom.**

**Class Action Settlement Curtails Risk of Homelessness for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care**

Lawyers For Children, the Legal Aid Society, and the law firm Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP have resolved a major class action lawsuit against The City of New York and the Commissioner of New York City’s Administration for Children’s Services (ACS). The settlement protects the right of youth aging out of foster care to secure safe and appropriate housing prior to their discharge from foster care. This lawsuit puts a halt to the City’s systematic failure to provide young people aging out of foster care with timely and effective services and support to prevent them from becoming homeless. The settlement requires the City to maintain a unit devoted exclusively to this population. In addition, the City will initiate training for foster care agencies, significantly revise its procedures for helping youth find stable housing, and put new procedures in place to improve access to services. The settlement also requires that ACS provide supervision and services to young people who are not yet 21, but who have already been discharged from foster care and find themselves without stable housing. These vulnerable young adults who have left foster care to live on their own will now have access to the critical and often life-saving services that ACS has agreed to provide under the terms of the settlement.

**New Transition Planning Court Improves Outcomes for Youth Aging Out**

In last year’s newsletter, we shared the news that Lawyers For Children had spearheaded the creation of an innovative problem-solving model court in Manhattan Family Court, called the Transition Planning Court (TPC). The TPC focuses exclusively on the critical needs of youth in foster care who are 16 and older and do not have biological or adoptive family to whom they can be discharged. The TPC’s mission is to ensure that the child welfare system fulfills its legal obligation to prepare youth to transition out of foster care successfully.

Over the past year, the TPC has been instrumental in helping our clients achieve success as independent young adults. LFC Youth Advocate Jarel Melendez says that even in its first year of operation, the court has already benefited many of LFC’s clients, who have told him that they have felt heard, recognized and cared for by the court more than ever before.

**Lady Gaga Award Enables LFC to Enhance Services for Teen Clients**

Thanks to an award of $100,000 from Lady Gaga and the Robin Hood Foundation to support at-risk youth, LFC was able to hire our second Youth Advocate, Renee Wingate. Renee works with LFC’s social workers and attorneys to help clients ages 18 to 21 accomplish the concrete tasks that allow them to work towards independence, such as obtaining vital documents, engaging in job searches and applying for college.

In addition, we now offer Community Voicemail to all of our clients who are 16 and older. Because many youth in foster care struggle to maintain a consistent cell phone plan, there are many times when they are not reachable and therefore miss out on information about important appointments and opportunities. Community Voicemail provides a free voicemail box with a local phone number to each participating LFC client, giving them a reliable place to receive messages regarding education, employment and housing opportunities, as well as messages from social service and medical providers. Without your support in the Lady Gaga/Robin Hood contest, we would not have been able to make these wonderful additions to our staff and to the services we offer.

**Making safe and loving homes a reality for every child**

**LFC Team Helps Grandmother Overcome Obstacles to Adoption**

Isaac was only two and his sister, Naiah, was just a baby when their mother, who suffered from schizophrenia, left them with an elderly neighbor and never returned. The children were placed into foster care, and Lawyers For Children was assigned to the case. Isaac and Naiah’s LFC social worker immediately began contacting members of their extended family, and soon reached their grandmother in Georgia, who was shocked to learn that her grandchildren had been abandoned. She expressed her desire to care for and adopt the children immediately. After the LFC social worker evaluated the home, the children’s attorney went to court to obtain an order permitting them to move to their grandmother’s home as soon as possible. Once the children were settled in the home and their social worker confirmed that they were doing well, their LFC attorney expedited the filing of an adoption petition.

The last step was for the children’s grandmother to travel to New York to appear at the adoption proceeding. However, just weeks before the adoption was to take place, Isaac and Naiah’s social worker discovered that though the cost of the flight was a financial hardship for our clients’ grandmother, the foster care agency had refused to book the flight for her. Thanks to LFC’s emergency discretionary fund, we were able to prevent the collapse of the adoption by covering the cost of the plane ticket.

On a very happy day for the entire family, the adoption was finalized, and the children have been thriving in their grandmother’s care ever since.

**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.**
Each summer, LFC offers an intensive internship opportunity to highly qualified law and college students. These 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 in this system. 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**
- Robin Axelman
  - New York Law School
- Shereece Nicole Blake
  - Thurgood Marshall School of Law - Texas Southern University
- Kathryn Hensley
  - Brooklyn Law School
- Krystan Hitchcock
  - New York University School of Law
- Amelia Hochman
  - Fordham University School of Law
- Michael Homan
  - Brooklyn Law School
- Mathilde Jayais
  - University of Toulouse
- Azeemah Kola
  - Yale Law School
- Lindsey Olson
  - Fordham University School of Law
- Mathew Shorstein
  - Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law
- Laura Solecki
  - Brooklyn Law School
- Jennifer Wang
  - New York Law School

**Social Work Interns**
- Aaron Bray
  - Brandeis University
- Shanni Davidowitz
  - Franklin & Marshall College
- Aliza Green
  - Dartmouth College
- Anna Harnick
  - Harvard University
- Abril Loya
  - Princeton University
- Adam Marcu
  - Wesleyan University
- Reniece McIntyre
  - Cornell University
- Racquel Smith
  - Cornell University
- Robert Tanner
  - Dartmouth College

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