Executive Director’s Message

As LFC approaches the end of its third decade of helping New York City’s children find safety, stability, and well-being, I find myself reflecting on the depth and breadth of the changes we have achieved on behalf of children in foster care. LFC has supported legislation, initiated class action litigation, and collaborated with community organizations and advocates to ensure positive change in the child welfare system, all while enhancing the services we offer to every client, every day.

Almost 20 years ago, LFC successfully fought for the legislative change that ensured that every child in foster care in New York State would be represented by an attorney. Since that time, we have participated in class action litigation that restructured New York City’s entire foster care system; ensured that youth aging out of foster care would not be placed in homeless shelters; guaranteed that abusers rather than children would be removed from homes where severe domestic violence was taking place; supported legislation that has enabled youth who leave foster care at age 18 to return if they find themselves homeless or in need of care before they turn 21; and collaborated with the Administration for Children’s Services to make certain that LGBTQ youth in foster care are placed in affirming and supportive homes.

Over the next 30 years we will continue to use what we learn in our direct representation of individual children to identify systemic problems that must be overcome for the benefit of all children in foster care. I know that we would not be preparing to enter our 30th year with such a remarkable legacy of achievements behind us without you at our side as partners in the fight for the rights of children.

Karen Freedman, Executive Director

Young Parents Initiative Completes Its First Year

In the fall of 2012, LFC introduced an educational program, the Young Parents Initiative, for our clients who are parenting while in foster care. The program has recently completed its first 16 session series. The group was designed to create a support network for young parents and improve their access to the information and resources that can help them achieve their personal goals and care for their children successfully. The creator and leader of the group, LFC social worker Mary Ellen Shea, LMSW, along with Janine Weisenbeck, MSW, the program’s intern, brought in speakers from within LFC as well as from outside agencies.

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cies to share their expertise on topics including child health and development, early intervention, mentoring programs, aging out of foster care while parenting, and educational challenges faced by parents in foster care.

As Mary Ellen explains, “The group members have become close over the last eight months. Having the opportunity to connect with other young people who are also attending school, working, and taking care of their children has proven to be a powerful source of motivation and encouragement.”

Group meetings also served as a wonderful opportunity to help members take advantage of all of the resources LFC has to offer, including the Baby Boutique. In the past year, over 50 young families have visited LFC’s Baby Boutique and taken home new or “like new” baby or toddler clothing, books, toys, and other items they can use to help them care for their young children. As always, donations to the Baby Boutique are what keep it running and are greatly appreciated by LFC and by the young parents who are relying on us.

The Young Parents Initiative will begin a new series in the fall, with several of this year’s graduates planning to return as mentors to new group members.

Board of Directors Expands

We are excited to announce that Lawyers For Children’s Board of Directors has recently expanded to include Patricia (“Trish”) O’Donald and Jeremy Fielding. Trish is one of five sector heads at Kingdon Capital Management and has over 15 years of investment experience. In addition, she has a long record of supporting nonprofits that serve children in need both in New York and abroad. Jeremy, who is a Senior Vice President of Kekst and Company, has extensive experience counseling executives, boards and in-house communications professionals on ongoing communications opportunities and challenges. He has also advised several well-known nonprofit organizations and educational institutions.

Our newest board members have already proved to be invaluable assets to Lawyers For Children. Trish is currently supporting the creation of a short video for LFC that will help us transmit our mission concisely and effectively. Jeremy has consulted with management and has already been a tremendous resource regarding communications, publicity and press coverage. We couldn’t be more fortunate when it comes to the generosity and counsel provided by all of our board members.

Loving Foster Family Adopts Two-Year-Old Child

Victor’s mother abandoned him just a few months after he was born. He was placed with a foster family, the Castillos, who bonded with him immediately and hoped to adopt him as soon as possible. However, Victor’s foster care agency opposed the adoption because Victor was showing signs of developmental delays, and the agency claimed that his foster parents were not getting him the services he needed. When Lawyers For Children was assigned to represent Victor, his LFC social worker met him and the Castillos in their home. It was immediately clear that the Castillos desperately wanted to ensure Victor’s health and well-being and that they were simply having trouble communicating with the agency social worker, who did not speak Spanish. Victor’s LFC social worker, who is bilingual, worked closely with the Castillos to make sure that Victor was getting the diagnostic and therapeutic services he needed, and that they understood and were engaged in the process. Meanwhile, Victor’s LFC attorney advocated in court for Victor to be enrolled in Early Intervention. Victor is now reaching his developmental milestones, and two months ago, just after his second birthday, he was adopted by the Castillos, the only parents he has ever known.
LFC Creates Cutting Edge Online Resources

Recently, we have made two upgrades to our media content to drastically improve our clients’ ability to access information relevant to their lives. In April, Lawyers For Children rolled out a new Facebook page designed exclusively for our clients, entitled Empowering YOUth. This page contains up-to-the-minute information about jobs, educational opportunities, summer programs, and other information helpful for young people navigating the foster care system.

In addition, LFC’s original You Are Not Alone handbook series for youth in foster care is now available in a searchable and easy to navigate digital format that can be accessed on our website and on mobile devices, at www.lawyers-forchildren.org/handbooks. These two projects are just a small part of our commitment to helping our clients learn to advocate for themselves as they chart a path to a proud future.

LFC Honored in Child Welfare Community

During the past year, Lawyers For Children and its staff members were recipients of a number of prestigious awards. Karen Freedman was chosen as the recipient of the Outstanding Legal Advocacy Award, from the National Association of Counsel for Children. This award recognizes individuals who have made important contributions to the field of children’s law. Deputy Executive Director Glenn Metsch-Ampel was selected as the recipient of the 2013 Howard A. Levine Award, given by the New York State Bar Association for excellence in the field of juvenile justice and child welfare. LFC Youth Advocate Jarel Melendez was chosen as the recipient of the Administration for Children’s Services’ 2013 LGBTQ Youth Advocate Award. In addition, Lawyers For Children’s project on behalf of LGBTQ youth was selected to receive the LGBTQ Community Ally and Leadership award.

*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. 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**
- Caitlyn Carpenter
  Columbia Law School
- Amy Gilbert
  Loyola University Chicago School of Law
- Jodi Guinn
  Harvard Law School
- Marsha Ignatyeva
  CUNY School of Law
- Leslie Jacomino
  New York University School of Law
- Maegan McAdam
  Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law
- Lindsay Melworm
  Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law
- Samantha Schnier
  New York University School of Law
- Alaina Varvaloucas
  Yale Law School
- Margaret Zisser
  Harvard Law School

**Social Work Interns**
- Aldel Brown
  Howard University
- Julia Kaplan
  Boston University
- Rebecca Litt
  Columbia University
- Leah Mack
  Brandeis University
- Augusta Powell
  Princeton University

- Molly Rappaport
  Wesleyan University
- Alana Seixas
  Cornell University
- Genna Sinel
  Brown University
- Molly Sir
  Macalester College
- Chanel Washington
  Harvard University
- Michelle Wexler
  Brandeis University
- LaMarte Williams
  Skidmore College

www.lawyersforchildren.org