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 abused and neglected children, children in foster care, and children in high conflict custody cases—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 foster care into reality by providing critically needed, top-quality legal representation and social work services. Every day, LFC staff can be found in the courtroom and in the community, advocating on behalf of children in New York City.

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 dramatically improve the lives of youth in foster care and compel comprehensive reform of the foster care system.
Our Programs & Services

1. Individual Advocacy – An Interdisciplinary Approach

At Lawyers For Children, a lawyer and social worker, both with extensive experience and training in child advocacy, 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 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 30,000 children in New York City court proceedings involving: voluntary foster care placement, abuse, neglect, termination of parental rights, adoption, 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 Clients: Michael & Caleb

Michael was born to a mother struggling with serious mental illness. After repeated hospitalizations, she determined that she was unable to care for Michael and placed him in foster care. When LFC was assigned to represent him, Michael was thriving in a loving home.

Soon after, another son, Caleb was born and placed in a separate foster home. In an effort to sustain the sibling bond, Michael’s LFC social worker approached his foster mother, who willingly opened her heart and home to Caleb. However, the City refused to placed Caleb with Michael because they felt the home was too small.

The brothers’ LFC attorney went to court and their LFC social worker testified to the importance and viability of keeping the boys together. The judge listened and ordered the City to revisit the home and submit evidence why the boys should remain apart. At the next court date, the City reversed their position and the brother were united. Last year, their adoption was finalized and their future is now secure.
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, Crossover Youth (youth with both child welfare and juvenile justice involvement), Domestic Violence, Education Advocacy, LGBTQ Rights, Public Policy & Special Litigation, School Suspension, and the Adolescents Confronting Transition.

Our largest 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 two 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. SIJS orders provide a path to legal permanent residency and have been under attack at the Federal level. In addition, we screen all clients for immigration issues and provide them Know Your Rights guides to protect themselves during these uncertain times.

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 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.
At 16, Martina was abducted by a gang in El Salvador that forced girls into sexual slavery. Martina miraculously escaped and enduring the harrowing journey from Central America to the U.S. By word of mouth, she found her way to a runaway shelter in NYC and LFC was assigned to represent Martina soon after she was placed into foster care. Martina’s LFC attorney immediately went to court to secure the special immigration status that is available to youth in foster care.

Martina repeatedly told her LFC team how important education was to her, and LFC made sure she had the proper support to secure financial aid for college.

While she waits for her green card, Martina is attending college in one of the only city programs that provides funding and housing for undocumented students. Martina says she no longer defines herself by her immigration status or her past. She defines herself as a pre-med student with a shining future.

Featured Client: Martina
3. 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.

Our Recent Impact:

- **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.

- **Halting Cruel & Unconscionable Child/Family Separation Policy**: Using LFC’s 35 years of expertise advocating for children’s rights, LFC along with other child advocacy organizations successfully stopped the Trump Administration’s policy of separating migrant children from their families. In a decision by a federal judge to immediately reunify children and stop the practice, our amicus brief was cited to prove how separating families causes irreparable harm to children and violates nationally accepted child welfare laws and principles.

- **Reducing Criminalization of Youth in Foster Care**: Too often, youth in foster care are unnecessarily pushed into the justice system when foster care agencies and ACS involve law enforcement rather than using positive youth development interventions. We are pleased that LFC along with the Legal Aid Society won a landmark appellate ruling in May that bans the engrained practice of seeking arrest warrants to return youth in foster care to their placements simply because they have run away from what are often frightening or dangerous living situations. LFC’s client, Nevayah, was detained for three months in an out-of-state detention facility as a result of an arrest warrant. Her case was featured in a *New York Times* story, “She Ran From Foster Care. She Ended Up in Handcuffs and Leg Irons”
# Income & Expenses for Fiscal Year Ended March 31, 2019

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