

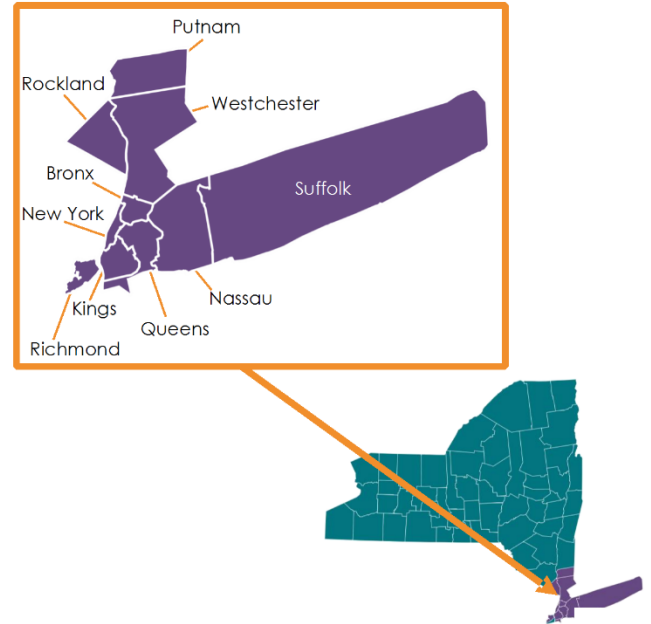
The Family Center

2023 – 2024

Report

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

The Family Center’s (TFC) Legal Wellness Institute (LWI) provides accessible, holistic, civil legal services to low income New Yorkers impacted by serious illness or disability. Our model is designed to facilitate meaningful access to justice for those facing multiple barriers. Our work ensures that clients have income, safe and appropriate housing, health care, stable family relationships, and a plan for the future. This grant year we closed 477 cases benefiting 796 New Yorkers. This work gained our clients at least \$201,536.30 in lump sum and retroactive awards and \$32,437.51 per month in ongoing payments (\$389,250 annually). We also saved clients \$117,816.29 in lump sum discharges and payments avoided, plus \$17,156.89 in ongoing monthly savings (\$205,882.68 annually). Many of these savings will last for years. We also provided legal education, pro se assistance, and referrals to thousands of New Yorkers, as described more below. These numbers cannot capture hundreds of outcomes that do not easily translate to dollar values. Similarly, these numbers do not fully reflect how our work this year ensured that many New Yorkers had access to justice when they otherwise would not have.



Service Area: New York State Metropolitan Area

Population Served: Low-Income Populations

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:
Total Staff: 7

Lawyers: 5 Paralegals: 2

Our work saved NY taxpayers more than \$1.97 million in just this year alone, and savings from many cases closed this year will continue long into the future. By ensuring clients have appropriate home care services and housing, we prevented unnecessary nursing home placements, saving NY taxpayers \$185,708.18 this year. By preventing evictions through representation in nonpayment and holdover cases, we kept New Yorkers out of the costly shelter system, saving NY taxpayers \$1,564,499. Through our work on guardianship and custody matters, we kept children with known caregivers instead of entering the foster care system, saving NY taxpayers \$224,000 for just one year of care.

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

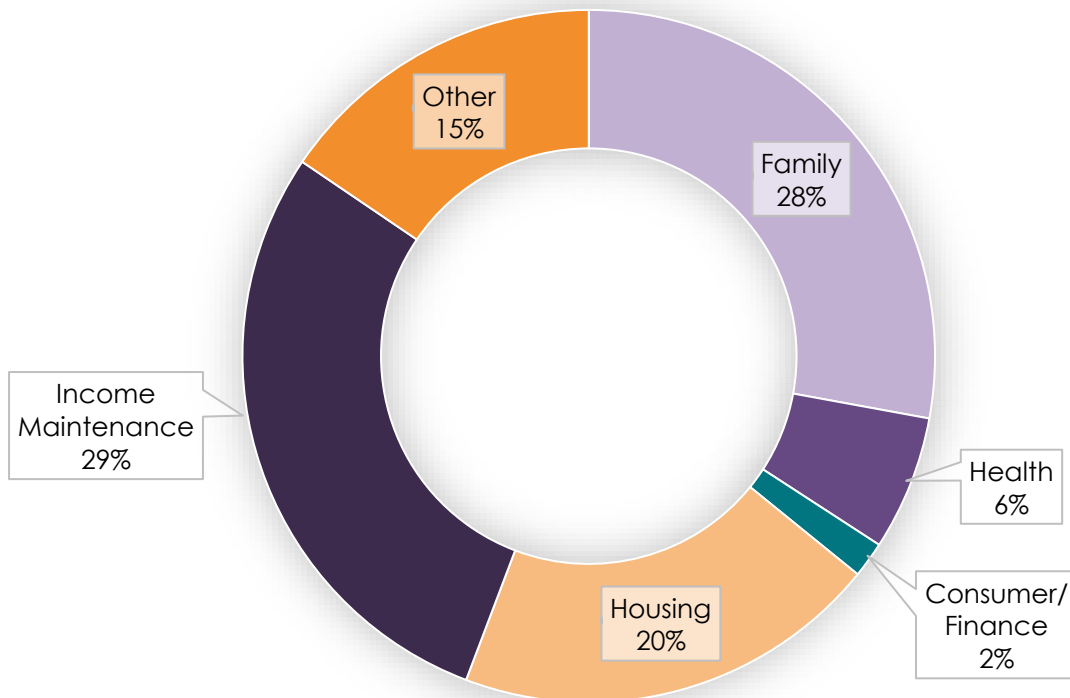
As a small office serving a hard-to-reach population, outreach is a high priority for LWI. We work hard to maintain relationships with community partners who refer clients: hospitals, hospices, supportive housing providers, government agencies, patient support groups, etc. We lead presentations and clinics with these and other partners, as described in Section C, and we also participate in outreach-focused community events, including resource fairs, tabling events, and presentations about our services. Finally, some clients find us through our online legal educational materials, while others find us through 311, LawHelpNY, or other resource directories.



CASE EXAMPLES

Family: Daniel is a 22-year-old young man from Queens who experienced a tragic loss in late 2022 when his mother died from breast cancer, leaving behind Daniel and his two younger sisters, Laura (12) and Elise (16). With their father nowhere to be found, Daniel came to LWI for help petitioning for guardianship of Elise and Laura. Shortly after petitioning for guardianship, Daniel's LWI attorney learned that the siblings' landlord had filed a petition to evict them from their rent-stabilized apartment. Our office agreed to represent Daniel in the holdover eviction matter. Daniel's attorney also helped connect the siblings with bereavement support and therapy services. In December 2023, Daniel was granted guardianship of both of his sisters. In February 2024, Daniel's landlord agreed to discontinue the eviction case. Thanks to LWI's holistic approach, Daniel and his sisters avoided eviction and can remain together as they rebuild their lives in the wake of their terrible loss.

CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA



Housing: Freddie is a 69-year-old cancer survivor who lives in a rent-stabilized apartment in the Bronx. In early 2023 he was hospitalized for a period of several months, causing him to fall behind on his rent. When Freddie received a nonpayment petition from his landlord, he called LWI looking for help to save his home. We assigned Freddie an attorney to represent him in his housing court case. Freddie's LWI attorney was able to get him a one-time emergency grant to cover his arrears, preventing his eviction and saving his rent-stabilized housing. But she also noticed that, while Freddie had a CityFHEPS rent subsidy that kept his rent relatively affordable, he was repeatedly missing rent payments because of his frequent hospitalizations. Freddie did not have a bank account and had been going to the post office in person each month to obtain a money order for his rent. Any time he was hospitalized around the beginning of a month, he would miss that month's rent payment. In order to prevent future eviction cases, Freddie's attorney helped him to set up a bank account in which he could receive deposits of his monthly SSI benefits. She then helped Freddie schedule monthly recurring automatic rent payments. Now, when Freddie has health complications, he can focus on getting better without having to worry about whether he might lose his home. Additionally, during the course of the case, Freddie received a notice from CityFHEPS that the amount he owed to the landlord (his "rent portion") was set to increase. Freddie showed the notice to his LWI attorney, who realized that CityFHEPS had incorrectly calculated his new portion at 50% of his income rather than 30%. Freddie's attorney contacted CityFHEPS on his behalf and advocated for his portion to be corrected. As a result, Freddie received a new notice returning his portion to the correct amount.

OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

We share our expertise on legal issues affecting seriously ill and disabled New Yorkers in a variety of ways beyond individual client representation. These include community legal education, pro se assistance, and web-based assistance. During the grant year, community legal education events were held both in-person and online via interactive platforms such as Zoom. This grant year we conducted six (6) interactive online legal education events for audiences including cancer patient support groups and client groups of other community organizations. Presentation topics ranged from end of life financial and legal planning for people with terminal illness, to Medicaid rules, to work incentives and rules for various benefits programs. We also conducted six (6) in-person community legal education events, a three-fold increase over the last grant year.

Through our in-person and online community legal education events this grant year, we provided important legal information to 337 New Yorkers. In this grant year, sixty (60) additional people watched the recorded video of a live webinar event that we presented in the 2022-2023 grant year on the topic of Standby Guardianship Designations. Each community legal education event includes specialized materials and/or slides prepared with the specific audience in mind. In addition to these events, we distributed at least 65 legal resource guides and other self-help materials directly to providers and community members.

34

people
benefited
from
**Pro Se
Assistance**

462

people
benefited
from
**Community
Legal
Education**

2,449

people
benefited
from
**Web-Based
Assistance**

TECHNOLOGY & IOLA TECH GRANT

LWI implemented a new legal case management database, LegalServer, in the 2022-2023 grant year. In this grant year, staff underwent additional training to become fully conversant with the new system and learn how to make the most use of its features. LegalServer is a significant improvement over our previous client management database, which was primarily intended as an electronic health record. LWI staff have found that LegalServer has allowed us to more efficiently manage our intake process, track trainings and outreaches, and collate client data for analysis and program improvement. Compared to our previous database, LegalServer has significantly centralized and streamlined our processes for tracking, collecting, recording and reviewing intakes, case information, time records, notes, and more. All of this helps to save staff time and leads to better data and easier reporting and monitoring.

This grant year, The Family Center upgraded our telephone system to the Zoom platform. Our Zoom phone system includes new features that have streamlined and improved our communications with clients, referring providers, courts, and administrative agencies, including automatic voicemail transcriptions and email notifications for new voicemails; the ability to make and receive phone calls via either the Zoom platform on our laptops, or via a cell phone app; the ability to send secure text messages via the Zoom platform; and improved team access to our intake voicemail inbox. The Zoom phone platform also integrates seamlessly with our preexisting Zoom videoconferencing account, further improving program efficiency.

The Family Center used the 2023 IOLA Technology Grant to purchase 8 laptops and 8 docking stations for legal staff and interns. Without the 2023 IOLA Technology Grant, The Family Center would not have been able to purchase this equipment.

The LWI team works almost exclusively on laptops with docking stations, rather than on desktop computers, in order to allow for greater flexibility and fluidity in navigating a variety of working environments. Because LWI serves a 5-county area and makes home and hospital visits to increase the accessibility of our services, this flexibility is key to efficient delivery of legal services. Staff frequently use their laptops to work from courts, administrative agencies, hospitals, and clients' homes in addition to our office and their own home offices. Because of the way we operate, LWI's laptops and related technology see very heavy use, and thus have shorter lifespans than more lightly or infrequently used machines. Replacing our equipment within reasonable timeframes ensures that staff are not slowed down by the equipment failures that inevitably occur as laptops age, even with excellent care and frequent updates.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

5law students volunteered **1,290** hours

This grant year, we were assisted by four (4) volunteers. During the summer, we hosted four law student interns, from Fordham Law School, Columbia Law School, NYU School of Law, and CUNY School of Law. Three interns worked a full-time schedule for ten weeks. One intern worked sixteen hours per week for fifteen weeks. Interns assisted attorneys on cases in all of our practice areas, providing research support, completing client intakes, collecting information and documents, advocating with administrative agencies, and many other important tasks. We currently have a spring semester intern who comes to us from the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School, but because of scheduling conflicts she was not able to begin her work with us until April. Interns and volunteers are recruited through a variety of means: we attend NYU's Public Interest Career Fair where we meet with and interview many law students interested in public interest work; we have relationships with a number of local law school career services or public interest offices, who refer potential interns and externs. Our volunteer opportunities are listed on probono.net and our own website. Finally, it is not uncommon for past interns and volunteers to recommend working with LWI to others. All volunteers go through intensive training that covers confidentiality, ethical issues, and practical issues about how to work in our office, in addition to substantive trainings in our practice areas and relevant skills.

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

Because our work focuses on those affected by serious illness and disabilities, we often collaborate with healthcare providers and other organizations serving these populations. As referenced in Section C, we work frequently with various organizations that provide patient support, often for people impacted by cancer. Frequent partners include LatinaSHARE, which provides support for Spanish-speaking women impacted by breast and ovarian cancers, and the Red Door Community, which provides support and programs for people facing any type of cancer. We frequently provide community legal education events for groups led by these organizations and also receive referrals for individuals in need of services from these organizations. We also frequently partner with supportive housing providers, such as CAMBA and Lantern Community Services, bringing our services on-site for their clients through legal clinics and legal education events. Finally, we receive many referrals and calls from NYC hospitals, hospices, other healthcare facilities and community-based organizations.

In addition, as part of a multidisciplinary organization, we are fortunate to have built-in partnerships with the other programs within our own agency. TFC provides a variety of supportive, social, and health services and programs for low-income New Yorkers, many of whom are coping with serious illnesses or disabilities. These services include mental and behavioral healthcare, substance use treatment and support, individual and family counseling, supportive and health education programming for people living with HIV, and support for non-parent caregivers, among others. Our colleagues in other TFC departments sometimes identify clients of their programs who are experiencing legal problems and refer them internally for assistance through LWI. Most frequently, these referrals come from our caregiver support or HIV support programs. These referral relationships are bidirectional: LWI staff also connect legal clients with supportive and other services through other TFC programs as and when appropriate.

Finally, LWI has extensive relationships with other legal services providers and is an active participant in the New York legal services community. We are an active member of the New York State Legal Services Coalition and all of our attorneys are members of the New York State Bar Association and NYC Bar Association. We regularly provide technical assistance to other legal services providers on matters ranging from special needs planning and benefits protection to child guardianships. We also collaborate with other legal services organizations on individual cases where clients have needs that are being addressed by both our team and another legal services provider.

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

\$954,395	
IOLA Funding	\$132,895
City & County Funding	\$197,000
State Funding	\$384,500
Foundations	\$240,000

