

ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN OF NEW YORK

2022-2023

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Advocates for Children of New York (AFC) directly assisted 12,691 individuals by providing one-on-one advice or case representation or preparing them to advocate for themselves through our community workshops and fairs. We secured over \$9.2 million in educational services for our clients. We provided 267 trainings and workshops and attended 14 fairs to distribute information to families. In addition, we disseminated more than 1 million informational documents via our website, email, and other methods to help families advocate for themselves.

AFC handles cases where low-income children in New York City are wrongfully excluded from school or denied the services that would enable them to learn and eventually graduate. Parents who come to us cannot figure out how to navigate the New York City Department of Education’s complex policies and procedures, and they cannot afford legal assistance to fight for what their children need. We help families secure the educational services and support their children need to succeed in school and maximize independence.

Our staff accompanies parents to school meetings and special education program reviews where services are negotiated and represents them in administrative hearings addressing suspensions or special education services. Staff also conducts workshops for parents and professionals in all five boroughs to teach them about educational rights and options so they can help advocate for students successfully.



Population Served: General Low Income Children and Families

Total Funding: \$6,076,923

Total IOLA Grant: \$112,500

Staffing Full Time Equivalent:

- Total Staff: 52.96
- Other: 25.11
- Lawyers: 27.85

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES: CASES

Case 1, Education:

Jennifer contacted our Helpline in September after her son, Anthony, was left behind on a school trip and had to find his way home alone. A 14-year-old with Autism, ADHD, and OCD who loves Harry Potter stories, Anthony was floundering in public schools where he was not receiving the support he needed to succeed academically. Jennifer was desperate to find a better and safer learning environment for her son. AFC worked with her to negotiate with the New York City Department of Education, ultimately helping to place Anthony in a special education program at Urban Assembly School for Media, which Jennifer thinks is exactly what he needed.

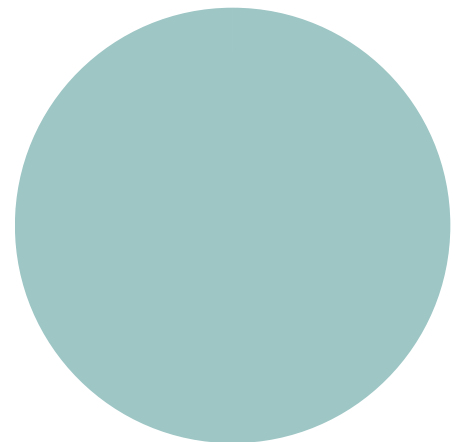
Case 2, Education:

At a family celebration this summer, 13-year-old Yacine’s relatives could not believe how bubbly and social she had become – the same young girl who had been so quiet and reserved just a few years earlier!

When Yacine and her mother, Fama, first came to Advocates for Children of New York, Yacine was struggling. An eager, hard-working student, Yacine was diligently committed to her classwork but had trouble grasping the material. As the pandemic surged, Yacine fell even further behind — without one-on-one support from a special education teacher as required by her Individualized Education Program (IEP), or remediation to help her adapt to the new remote learning environment, Yacine’s progress in math and reading completely stalled.

6,534 people benefitted from **6,534** legal cases closed

Cases by Legal Problem Area



Education
100%

Fama also was struggling, as she tried to navigate NYC's complex public school system. Though Fama speaks English, it is not her first language, and she was unsure of what some of the terms on her daughter's IEP meant, or how she could access information to help her make decisions about Yacine's educational rights. When the school failed to provide language support to allow her to participate meaningfully in her daughter's education, Fama would often be excluded from Yacine's special education planning.

When an evaluation, arranged by AFC, revealed that hearing loss, a language disorder, and specific learning disorders were behind Yacine's difficulties with verbal comprehension and her slower processing speeds, Fama and her AFC advocate identified a school that they hoped would be a better fit: one with smaller class sizes, evidence-based reading supports, and a safe environment where Yacine would not be subjected to bullying from classmates who did not understand her learning needs. AFC filed a hearing request to secure tuition for Yacine's placement at this school and fought successfully for occupational therapy and the tutoring she would need to catch up to her peers.

Since changing schools, Yacine's academic progress and her attitude towards school have changed completely. Though she entered her new school significantly behind grade level, Yacine graduated last June from 8th grade with her peers, and even won an award for academic perseverance! Fama recounts how Yacine now comes home each day bursting with stories about her day with friends, and how excited she is by what she's learning in the classroom. Yacine's teachers have seen that same progress, describing how much more confident Yacine has become, and how eagerly she now participates in class.

"Before, Yacine put in hard work, but she wasn't making progress and she was always struggling," said Fama. "But she never gave up. Now, she's getting the help she needs, and her hard work is getting positive results. Yacine always used to keep to herself. But now, she knows she can do it. She's confident now."

OTHER SERVICES: OVERVIEW

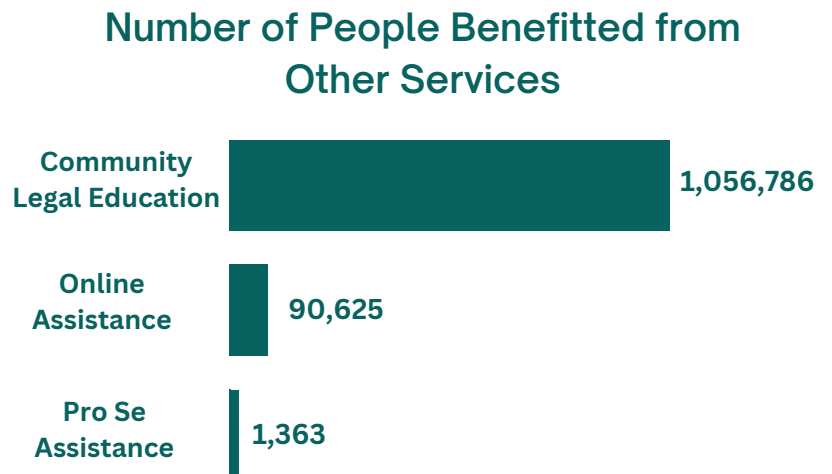
AFC assists parents and professionals in understanding the laws and systems important to the education of their children by providing community education. Due to AFC’s legal expertise, we have a particular strength in explaining to parents their rights and how to use the due process mechanisms available. Unless parents and the professionals who work with them are fully informed about the complicated rules and procedures through which they must navigate to obtain educational services, they will never be able to advocate independently.

AFC also prepares parents to invoke the procedural safeguards available to them, including mediations, resolution sessions, impartial hearings, state administrative complaints, and administrative appeals to resolve their education-related disputes.

In all of our workshops and almost every phone or support contact involving a child with special needs, we provide parents and professionals with information about the laws and regulations governing special education services. AFC provides workshops to NYC’s diverse communities and breaks down complicated education laws in parent-friendly brochures and training materials. We also provide training to build the capacity of community-based organizations, health care providers, and other groups that work with underserved parents to spot education-related problems and link the parents to the information they need.

During this reporting period, we provided 267 workshops to more than 6,000 parents, professionals, and students. In addition, our recorded webinars were viewed 9,200 times.

1,148,774
People
Benefitted from
Services Other
Than Direct
Legal Services



OTHER SERVICES: TECHNOLOGY

While we are once again attending some in-person fairs and providing in-person workshops, we are still seeing an overall preference for webinars versus in-person training. Virtual events provide more flexibility for participants and offer the option of viewing recorded versions at their convenience. Moving forward, we will continue to offer a hybrid version of our training program. We will, however, continue to ensure that our Spanish-speaking clients and those without digital access are reached in other ways including using WhatsApp.

During this grant period, we also began the process of re-designing our website, with the goal of launching a new site by June 2024. Our updated website will be more mobile friendly, have improved search capabilities, and be easier to navigate.

OTHER SERVICES: TRAININGS

AFC builds continual learning and improvement into our program model for individual staff, project teams, and the organization as a whole. Individual staff receive annual performance reviews focused on development of core competencies and also have the option of creating individualized development plans to focus on professional goals. All performance reviews include discussion of the staff member's learning and development goals for the coming year. In addition, AFC provides a robust in-house training program, including sessions related to diversity and inclusion, anti-racism, legal and advocacy skills, and education law and policy. Staff attorneys also attend external training programs and a PLI training in education law at least once a year. All of our Executive Team and most of our project directors have attended at least one off-site leadership development program, including programs offered through Columbia Business School, the New York Community Trust, and Community Resource Exchange. All supervisors are required to attend The Management Center's two-day Managing to Change the World course, and non-supervisory staff are given the opportunity to take a course at The Management Center as well.

With respect to our Board, it is our practice that all new Board members attend an orientation session with the Executive Director and that all Board members receive a term review by their peers every three years.

IMPACT CASES

L.V. v. New York City Department of Education:

L.V. v. New York City Department of Education is a federal class action lawsuit involving the DOE's systemic failure to implement hearing orders in a timely manner.

In 2007, the DOE settled with the families and agreed to implement all orders involving special education within 35 days, unless the hearing officer set a different deadline. The settlement had increasing benchmarks that the DOE committed to reach before the settlement sunsets. While a special unit for implementation of these orders created in 2011 was supposed to improve the DOE's rates of implementation, any improvement slipped, and the DOE is now failing to meet even the lowest agreed upon benchmark.

In September 2019 AFC and our pro bono co-counsel Milbank LLP filed a Motion for an Independent Special Master to oversee the DOE's implementation of these orders. In January 2021, the Court granted our motion and ordered the appointment of a Special Master. In March 2022, the Special Master filed with the Court his first report on findings regarding the DOE's hearing order implementation process, with findings of deficiencies in all areas of implementation. In March 2023, the Special Master filed with the Court his first set of recommendations for the DOE to change its system of hearing order implementation.

420,942
Beneficiaries
were affected
by 4 Impact
Cases

All Impact Cases:

- *L.V. v. New York City Department of Education*
- *Jose P. v. Mills*
- *J.L. v. New York City Department of Education*
- *Z.Q. v. New York City Department of Education*

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

In total, AFC had 115 pro bono attorneys, law students and other volunteers. AFC continues to maintain a robust Pro Bono Partners Program. In this grant period, assistance was provided in 34 cases by 54 pro bono volunteers from 13 firms. Thirty-six pro bono partners attended eight virtual trainings provided by AFC this year. There were an additional 15 attorneys but did not provide service during this time. We had 27 law student volunteers and 19 other volunteers, including college and high school interns.

AFC takes on law student volunteers in the fall, spring and summer. Usually, we have 3-6 term-time volunteers who work 10-15 hours a week. During the summer, we have 6-7 law interns and 2-3 college student interns. Summer interns work at AFC full-time for 10 weeks.



54 Attorneys volunteered 1,080 hours

27 Law Students volunteered 4,455 hours

19 Other Volunteers volunteered 4,998 hours

Each  icon is equal to 10 volunteers.

Attorneys are represented through the Green Figure.

Law Students and Other Volunteers are represented through the Grey Figure.

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

Our staff continued to work with hospital-based organizations that can evaluate our clients’ educational needs as well as provide information about evaluations and diagnoses for the students we serve. We maintain partnerships with the NYU Child Study Center, Promise Project, and the Center for Attention and Learning (CAL) at Lenox Hill Hospital. Our attorneys and caseworkers share their expertise with their staff by providing training and technical assistance.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

Advocates for Children of New York received **\$6,076,923** in total funding this past year

Foundations	\$2,390,922
Fundraising	\$1,884,777
City and County Funding	\$531,778
Federal Funding	\$234,881
State Funding	\$122,581
IOLA Grant	\$112,500
Other	\$799,484

