

THE FAMILY CENTER

2022-2023

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 access 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 433 cases benefitting 771 New Yorkers. This work gained our clients at least \$323,190.71 in lump sum and retroactive awards and \$14,613.00 per month in ongoing payments (\$175,356 annually). We also saved clients \$28,680 in lump sum discharges and payments avoided, plus \$12,555 in ongoing monthly savings (\$150,660 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.

During the grant year, LWI took on an intense infrastructure and technology improvement project: selecting and implementing a new legal case management database, LegalServer. Our previous client management database, evolv, was designed primarily as an electronic health record and was no longer effectively meeting our needs. After considering various legal case management programs, in July 2022, we began LegalServer’s onboarding process, working to build a site that meets our specific needs and learning how to customize the site, add new questions, fields, and forms, and create reports. With evolv, all of this required hiring a consultant; now our Director of Legal Services can easily make these changes. We transferred certain data for open cases from evolv into LegalServer and in late November, staff participated in extensive LegalServer training. As of December 1, we began recording all case and client information using LegalServer.



Population Served: Low Income Populations

Total Funding: \$1,098,023

Total IOLA Grant: \$87,500

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:

- Total Staff: 9.29
- Lawyers: 5
- Paralegals: 2
- Other: 2.29

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES: CASES

Case Example 1:

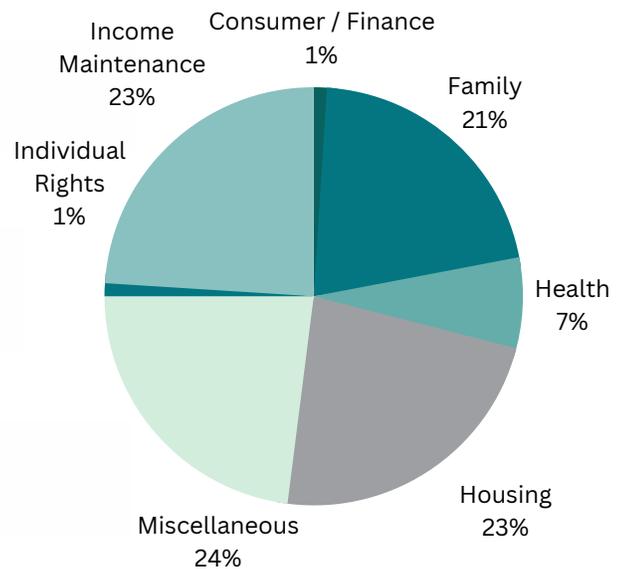
The Ruiz family[1] has four children ranging in age from three to 20. Marco, the 20-year-old, has severe intellectual and physical disabilities. He requires assistance with all tasks and uses a wheelchair. Parents Manuel and Rosa initially contacted LWI for a family law need: Article 17A guardianship of Marco. Since he became an adult, they faced barriers to coordinating his care, and at the time were unable to get him necessary dental care. LWI attorneys confirmed that Marco’s needs could not be met with a less restrictive alternative to guardianship, then worked with Manuel and Rosa to obtain evaluations and documents and to quickly file a petition. As Manuel and Rosa do not speak English, we worked with them in their preferred language of Spanish.

After a virtual hearing, guardianship was granted. Through home visits with the family while working on the guardianship, other legal needs became apparent, including housing and disability rights issues. Their apartment was not accessible. At Marco’s adult size, his parents could not safely carry him around or lift him in and out of the bathtub.

LWI represented Manuel and Rosa in requesting disability-related apartment modifications. After months of negotiation, their landlord agreed to make significant renovations, including widening the bathroom doorway, installing a walk-in/ADA shower, and changing the bathroom layout to fit the wheelchair and provide maneuvering space.

After much advocacy, the landlord also agreed to pay for an accessible hotel for the Ruiz family while renovations occurred, since their only bathroom would be unusable and they could not pay for other accommodations.

771 people benefitted from 433 legal cases closed



Cases by Legal Problem Area

Renovations are complete. Rosa and Miguel can now safely help Marco bathe and use the toilet. But as soon as renovations were done, the family received a nonpayment petition, as they were behind in their rent. We continue to represent the Ruiz family in Housing Court and are optimistic for a successful resolution.

Case Example 2:

Lisa is 59 years old and has a number of physical and mental health conditions. For most of her life she has lived alone in a rent-stabilized apartment in Brooklyn Heights.

She initially contacted LWI about a housing issue: her third nonpayment case within two years. Lisa struggled to pay both rent and out-of-pocket medical costs on her limited income of Social Security Disability (SSD). Her apartment also needed significant repairs: the only toilet frequently did not work and the kitchen sink leaked badly, among other serious issues. But Lisa's health prevented her from keeping her apartment in a tidy condition and her landlord refused to make repairs while the apartment was so cluttered.

LWI represented Lisa in the nonpayment case. We negotiated a settlement with generous time to pay arrears and set specific dates for the landlord to make enumerated repairs. LWI attorneys worked with APS to arrange a deep cleaning of Lisa's apartment and assisted Lisa in securing a large emergency grant from NYC HRA to cover her arrears. The case was successfully resolved with Lisa's arrears paid off, her apartment clean, and all repairs made.

However, it was clear to Lisa's LWI attorney that Lisa would soon end up back in Housing Court for nonpayment if something wasn't done about her healthcare access and income maintenance needs, which were negatively impacting her health and her ability to pay rent. Lisa's SSD benefits put her over the Medicaid income limit. So Lisa's LWI attorney helped her establish a pooled Supplemental Needs Trust account, and arranged for a portion of her SSD to transfer automatically into the trust each month, making her eligible for Medicaid. With Medicaid, Lisa saved hundreds of dollars each month in medical costs and medical transportation expenses. She also was able to obtain healthcare treatments she had put off because of the cost and became eligible for a home attendant. With automatic rent payments from the trust, her rent is paid in full and on-time.

Thanks to LWI's holistic approach, Lisa's health, income, and housing are much improved and stable on a long-term basis.

OTHER SERVICES: OVERVIEW

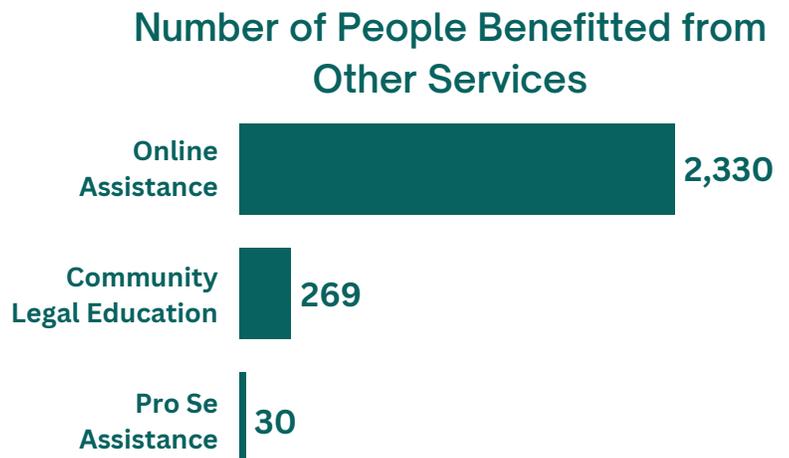
We share our expertise on legal issues affecting seriously ill and disabled New Yorkers in a variety of ways beyond individual client representation. These include community legal education, pro se assistance, and web-based assistance. During the grant year, community legal education events were held both in-person and online via interactive platforms such as Zoom.

This grant year we conducted eight (8) 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, and work incentives and rules for various benefits programs.

We also conducted two (2) in-person community legal education events: a workshop on consumer and financial fraud for TFC clients, and an overview of advance directives for a women’s patient group at a local healthcare clinic. Through our in-person and online community legal education events this grant year, we provided important legal information to 143 New Yorkers. Thirty-four (34) additional people have watched the video of one live webinar event, now available via YouTube, as discussed more below. 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 92 legal resource guides and other self-help materials to providers and community members.

2,629 People Benefitted from Services Other Than Direct Legal Services



OTHER SERVICES: TECHNOLOGY

As discussed in Section A, during the grant year, LWI implemented a new legal case management database, LegalServer. LegalServer, which is designed specifically for civil legal service providers, is a significant improvement over our previous client management database, evolv, which was primarily intended as an electronic health record. Senior LWI staff worked hard during the grant year to build a LegalServer site that meets our specific needs and to learn how to manage, further customize, and improve the site as admins. With LegalServer, we can easily add new questions to intake and other forms, track new data points, and collate client data and information in infinite ways, all in-house. LegalServer has a user-friendly interface making it easier to learn for new staff. 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 lead to better data and easier reporting and monitoring.

OTHER SERVICES: TRAININGS

To ensure that all staff have the knowledge and skills necessary to partner effectively with our clients, TFC has a strong commitment to training and professional development. In connection with our ongoing work to promote racial justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, as well as our work to provide trauma informed care, TFC has an agency-wide subcommittee that is currently reviewing and making recommendations for staff training policies, procedures, and requirements. All new TFC staff go through an agency-wide orientation that was redesigned in 2020. New LWI staff, interns, and volunteers receive in-depth trainings in all of our practice areas; relevant legal ethics topics; how to complete high-quality and compassionate intake interviews; documentation and record-keeping requirements; cultural humility; trauma and vicarious trauma; and a number of other topics important to our work. After orientation, new LWI staff members are generally co-assigned to cases with existing staff and then assigned cases of increasing complexity with close monitoring by supervisors. Professional development opportunities are discussed regularly during supervision, and all staff are required to participate in ongoing CLE in relevant practice areas and legal skills, as well as non-CLE training in issues that affect our work and our clients. In addition to covering CLE costs, TFC provides an annual education benefit that can be used for classes, training, and certifications that will enhance staff's work. Staff are also encouraged to participate in associations, coalitions, and committees.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

This grant year, we were assisted by five (5) volunteers. During the summer, we hosted three law student interns, from Brooklyn Law School, NYU School of Law, and CUNY School of Law. Two interns worked a full-time schedule during the summer. One intern worked four days per week. 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. During the fall semester, we were joined by an intern from Brooklyn School of Law, who worked part-time in connection with a Health Law externship program. Finally, a foreign qualified attorney who began volunteering with us in 2020 continued to provide research and other support for some client cases during 2022. 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.



1 Attorneys volunteered 12 hours

4 Law Students volunteered 1,150 hours

Attorneys are represented through the Grey Figure.
Law Students are represented through the Green Figure.

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.

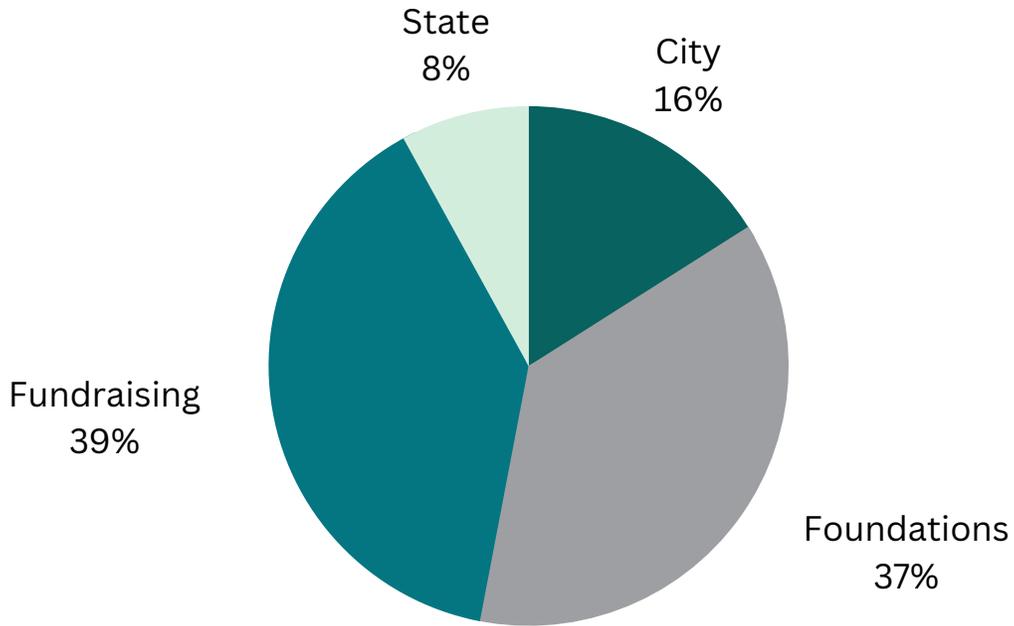
We also frequently partner with supportive housing providers, such as CAMBA and Lantern Community Services, bringing our services on-site for their clients through legal clinics and legal education events.

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. This referral process goes both ways. LWI staff sometimes connect legal clients with supportive and other services through other TFC programs.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

The Family Center received **\$1,098,023** in total funding for civil legal services this past year



State Funding	\$425,523
Foundations	\$410,000
City and County Funding	\$175,000
IOLA Grant	\$87,500
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Total	\$1,098,023