Overview of Achievements, 2020-2021

LIFT provided about 25,000 families with high quality legal advice and information, expert guidance, and community education during the reporting period of April 2020 through March 2021. We worked closely with the Family Court, public officials, and a growing network of community-based organizations to enhance our core programs and deepen services. More than ever before, the New York City Family Court relies on LIFT to address the urgent needs of families that have been forced to wait indefinitely for access to justice in court because of the pandemic.

LIFT’s staff has worked remotely full-time to respond to the acute stress that families have experienced since the pandemic arrived. As always, we are continuing to provide otherwise unavailable resources, support, and advice on child support, custody and visitation, and orders of protection from domestic violence. Highlights of the past year include the following:

Consultations: These in-depth consultations enable unrepresented litigants to receive vital support in preparing a case. The demand was high all year and our team had a full schedule, providing more than 1,600 consultations.

Family Law Information Helplines: The past year brought record-breaking volume to our Telephone, Email and Live-Chat Helplines: 20,429 this year, up from 16,077 last year. The Helplines became the primary point of entry for parents who need LIFT’s support and guidance, and a central artery through which clients can access our more in-depth services.

Family Legal Connection (FLC): With user-friendly technology, the platform enables our clients to consult with pro bono attorneys. During the year, our pro bono attorneys completed a total of 186 consultations with our clients, up from 80 last year. FLC benefits include: 1) Clients receive family law advice without having to leave home, take time off from work, arrange childcare and transportation, or travel to Family Court for pro bono assistance; 2) Accessibility barriers for homebound and/or disabled litigants are removed; and 3) People who live in less populated counties and communities with few pro bono resources are no longer left behind.

Population Served: General Low Income Population
Area Served: New York City Metropolitan Area
Total Funding: $2,764,665
Total IOLA Grant: $135,000
Staffing - Full Time Equivalents:
- Total Staff: 19.23
- Lawyers: 10.52
- Others: 8.71
**Direct Legal Services**
1,804 people benefitted
1,804 legal cases closed

**Examples**

Family Law: Eduardo’s story is told here in the words of a LIFT Staff Attorney: When I first met Eduardo, I was moved by the loving way he spoke about his sister, Sonja. She had recently passed away from Covid-19 complications, and her 10-year-old son Victor (Eduardo’s nephew) was Eduardo’s primary concern. Together with Sonja, he had raised Victor since infancy. Eduardo said, “Victor doesn’t even know his biological father. I lived a block away from my sister and only went home to sleep. I was at every school function and every doctor’s appointment. He is my life.” Victor’s biological father apparently had no interest in raising him and had never tried to contact Sonja or Victor. Eduardo wanted full custody of Victor, but was concerned that as an undocumented immigrant, he would not have a strong custody case. He was afraid that Victor would be taken away from him and sent to foster care. The harsh reality is that Victor is among the vast numbers of children who have been orphaned by the pandemic, and their fates hang in the balance when the already overstretched Family Courts must determine an outcome that is in the best interest of each child. I advised Eduardo that his situation could be considered an “emergency” and I assisted him with the custody petition to get an emergency hearing in Family Court. By the end of our first consultation, Eduardo was in tears. He told me that he had knocked on so many doors and that this was the first time someone had listened to his story and was willing to help. The Court did, in fact, approve the emergency hearing, and then granted a Final Order of Custody, giving Eduardo sole custody of Victor.

Family Law: This example pertains to the Family Court’s Electronic Document Delivery System (EDDS), which is the website through which litigants petition the Court. LIFT has been helping clients navigate EDDS, and we developed a step-by-step guide to the system: Last fall, a LIFT Staff Attorney worked with a grandmother who had taken in her grandniece because the girl’s father (our client’s nephew) traveled frequently for work. Due to a non-COVID medical issue that required her hospitalization, our client had to send the girl back to her father. The grandmother is a Haitian immigrant with limited proficiency in English, so the Staff Attorney spent extra time in helping her and the girl’s father draft a stipulation petition to send to the Court. After they emailed the petition to the Court, they failed to receive a response, so the Staff Attorney provided them with our EDDS guide, which our client found very helpful. The grandmother submitted the petition using the instructions, and got a hearing within two days. Ultimately, the Court granted the stipulation, and our client expressed deep gratitude to LIFT’s Staff Attorney.
Other Services...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Legal Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro Se Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Assistance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other Legal Related Services: Overview

In addition to our Family Law Information Helplines, LIFT’s services that are applicable to this section include the following:

Legal Resource Guides (LRGs): LIFT’s original, multilingual LRGs—more than 40 in all—are unique publications, available at all programs (when we are not operating remotely only) and on our website. This year, over 100,000 visitors to our website accessed the digital LRGs, which may be downloaded. The guides cover a wide range of family law issues, including procedural topics such as how to begin a case, and detailed information on a litigant’s rights and possible remedies in the array of case types. The LRGs are written in an easy-to-understand Q&A format. They are often a litigant’s first exposure to the information provided, and quickly become crucial to the litigant’s ability to proceed successfully without representation. The LRGs are translated from English into eight languages: Chinese, French, Haitian/Creole, Hebrew, Korean, Russian, Spanish, and Yiddish.

We are expanding our library of Legal Resource Guides. With our renewed focus on LRGs, which included elevating a Staff Attorney to a leadership role in 2019 to oversee the growth of the program, LIFT responded to requests from the Family Court administration, the New York City Council, and other key stakeholders to develop new LRGs for specific topics and populations. For example, three of our recently-completed LRGs are each targeted to a specific constituency: 1) active military servicemembers; 2) military veterans; and 3) previously incarcerated parents. LIFT’s multilingual staff members and pro bono partners are translating our new LRGs into Spanish, Mandarin, and other languages. LIFT is developing new LRGs on emerging topics where there is a need as identified jointly by LIFT, the Family Court, and our community partners.

Family Law Education and Community Outreach: Working in the community before COVID-19, and remotely since the crisis started, LIFT reached hundreds of New Yorkers with our legal education workshops and clinics. The initiative primarily targets four key constituencies: 1) criminal justice-involved people; 2) immigrants; 3) veterans and active military service-members; and 4) survivors of domestic violence and abuse.

Since LIFT began remote work, we have held several well-attended webinars and launched an Instagram Live series in English and Spanish on family court changes due to COVID-19 and our practice areas of child support, custody and visitation, and protection from domestic violence. LIFT’s virtual events collectively reached 484 participants during the reporting period. Last summer, LIFT’s first Spanish-language Instagram Live session was interactive and conducted in partnership with Legal Hand. In September, LIFT successfully presented our own Spanish-language webinar. Our well-received Spanish-language programs were conducted by our bilingual staff members, and we connected with new constituencies and reached additional communities. With the virtual programs, we are now engaging the clients, staffs, and volunteers of numerous additional organizations, including Legal Hand, the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park, the Veteran Advocacy Project and the Bronx Vet Center, the Fortune Society, Queens Public Library, Brooklyn Defender Services, and Brooklyn Workforce Innovations.
Other Legal Related Services: Examples

Example 1: Legal Resource Guides: As part of LIFT’s ongoing expansion of Family Legal Connection to counties across the State, we are customizing key LRGs with county-specific information, including the following: ABCs of Family Court; Child Support; Custody & Visitation; How to Start a Case in Family Court; How to File an Objection or Rebuttal for Child Support; and Serving Court Papers.

Example 2: Family Law Education and Community Outreach Initiative: In response to the pandemic, the initiative is addressing key family law and Family Court topics that are increasingly important to the clients and staff of a wide variety of service providers across New York City. For example, many families are grappling with child visitation issues that are made more challenging by the realities and risks of the coronavirus. In addition, child support has emerged as a major issue of concern for many service providers and their clients. There has been dramatically increased awareness of the need for child support, and the fact that such cases are not currently being heard in Family Court because of the pandemic. Given that the staffs of many organizations lack any significant understanding of New York’s child support system and the Family Court process, they are turning to LIFT for information and guidance. Our numerous programmatic responses have included special online workshops focusing on child support.

Sources Of Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IOLA Grant</td>
<td>$135,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundations</td>
<td>$646,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising</td>
<td>$624,576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City &amp; County Funding</td>
<td>$1,051,312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>$307,027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>$2,764,665</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Significant Collaborations

LIFT has a very positive and productive working relationship with the Family Court. For example, during the pandemic, the New York City Family Court asked LIFT to assist litigants in completing and submitting forms that serve as a request for child support modifications, thus relieving the Court of a huge administrative burden. The request form will allow the Court to contact the litigant directly with further instructions once the Family Court fully reopens.

LIFT’s pro bono partners are among our most significant collaborators in growing Family Legal Connection (FLC). Details are included below in the section on Pro Bono Attorneys, Law Students and Other Volunteers.

Clients come to FLC largely by way of referrals mostly from Family Court, as well as from our community partners, which are nonprofit legal services providers. Outside of New York City, we have partnered for nearly two years with two providers: The Legal Project of the Capital District Women's Bar Association, located in Albany, and Nassau Suffolk Law Services. We also established partnerships with Legal Assistance of Western New York (LawNY) and the Rural Law Center. Both partners serve multiple counties and enable LIFT to serve families in additional areas of the State.

FLC is also playing a prominent role in new efforts by the New York State Court System and the State Bar Association to respond to urgent needs for legal services during or in the wake of the pandemic. As part of the COVID-19 Pro Bono Recovery Task Force, the Child Support Working Group is led by Judge Edwina Mendelson, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Justice Initiatives, in partnership with the law firm of Davis Polk. The Working Group recommended the expansion of FLC to connect more unrepresented litigants with pro bono attorneys for video consultations on child support matters. Family Courts in several judicial districts across the State are participating directly in the FLC expansion initiative. Court clerks and staff started distributing copies of a new promotional flyer directing interested litigants to contact LIFT’s Helplines for more information and/or to schedule an FLC appointment with a pro bono attorney.

Our Family Law Education and Community Outreach initiative has enabled us to forge important new collaborations. With partners such as the Veterans Advocacy Project we are connecting with additional constituencies and communities through webinars and similar online presentations.
Trainings

LIFT formed an internal Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) task force, which is comprised of nine staff members, including the CEO, and has been meeting weekly since September 2020. This initiative is a top priority for LIFT. The primary goals are to build a stronger and more diverse organization, to improve our understanding and support of DEI, to recruit great people when our organization grows, and to be representative of the community we serve. The task force selected Vernetta Walker, a highly experienced consultant and facilitator in this field, to guide the Board and staff through DEI-focused work. She successfully led an interactive session for the staff, and another specifically for the Board.

Training and development are enthusiastically embraced by LIFT’s Board. We begin by providing a comprehensive orientation for new Board members. The orientation session entails in-depth discussions of LIFT’s history and programs. It also helps them build the knowledge and skills they need to serve successfully. For example, training on the development process helps members understand the aspects of fundraising in which they play a key role.

As part of LIFT’s standard practice, we continued to provide ongoing, regularly scheduled training to all of our team members in order to ensure that we are providing the best information and advice to Family Court litigants. A high priority for LIFT is updating the staff on developments in the law, and how those developments play out in court. LIFT routinely brings in outside trainers through partner organizations to train on areas of law that intersect with Family Court. Recent trainings have included such topics as: De-escalation Techniques; Working with Military & Veteran Parents; Trauma Informed Lawyering; Implicit Bias; Calculating Child Support; Working with Parents who are Formerly Incarcerated or Criminal Justice-Involved; and, Working with Individuals presenting Mental Health Challenges. All attorneys are expected to meet New York State’s Continuing Legal Education requirements.
**Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement**

LIFT’s Family Legal Connection enables pro bono attorneys to provide clients with legal advice, while working from their own home or office, and broaden their impact by reaching litigants in distant locations. We now have more than 70 attorneys from 15 firms or corporate legal departments who have been trained to provide pro bono legal services on the FLC platform. The pace at which we are training new cohorts of volunteer attorneys for FLC is rapidly increasing.

Each partnership is formalized when a team of attorneys has been fully trained on using the FLC platform. Our dynamic, expanding pro bono program includes the following current and upcoming partners: Proskauer Rose; Sullivan & Cromwell; Stroock & Stroock & Lavan; Fried Frank; Skadden; Shearman & Sterling; Alston & Bird; Davis Polk; Salesforce; JP Morgan Chase; Bloomberg; Verizon; BNY Mellon; and AIG.

LIFT has also been approved by the New York State Court System to serve as a host organization for its Attorney Emeritus Program (AEP). Attorneys who are at least 55 years old, with a minimum of 10 years’ experience, are recruited by AEP to volunteer for approved host organizations and meet the needs of New Yorkers who cannot afford counsel.

In addition, law students are engaged in the provision of legal services as well as substantive research and writing projects. LIFT partners with law schools in New York City to provide summer opportunities for their students, including the following:

- Internship program for one law school student; and
- Liberty Aldrich Summer Fellowship for one NYU law student; the fellowship was established in honor of NYU School of Law alumna Aldrich, a LIFT co-founder who served on our Board of Directors for over two decades.

LIFT also recently forged a new partnership with New York Law School to establish a Family Law Clinic. Students enrolled in the Family Law Clinic will be exposed to Family Court practice and the Family Court Act, as well as to a range of family law matters. They will gain experience with interviewing clients, drafting documents, conducting legal research, and engaging in community outreach. The clinic will be taking place during the Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 terms. Each one-semester clinic will include a group of six students. LIFT’s Legal Director and Director of Legal Technology will serve as adjunct professors.

---

**Pro Bono Statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Volunteers</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attorney:</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>711.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law Students:</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>402.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others:</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1028.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>