CFR’s target population is primarily low-income parents, who are summoned to Family Court in Queens or Manhattan, whose children are at risk of entering, remaining in, or re-entering foster care, because ACS alleges their children are at risk of maltreatment. ACS disproportionately investigates and prosecutes Black and Brown families. CFR provides parents with holistic legal and social work support to enable children to live safely with their families and prevent the devastating consequences of foster care.

In FY22, with our team model of a lawyer, a social worker and a system-impacted parent advocate/mentor, we closed 1,476 cases, benefitting more than 4,492 people. 129 families reunified, 71 avoided a finding of neglect/and or abuse, 751 families avoided placement of children in foster care, and 12 avoided a termination of their parental rights. We completed 7 family defense appeals. Indigent parents involved with the ACS often confront interrelated collateral issues, rooted in poverty, such as unstable housing, financial insecurity, or immigration problems; these have the potential to undermine a family’s success. To address these, our Home for Good (HG) program provides legal and social work services in housing, public benefits, and immigration. HG staff worked on 20 full representation housing cases, provided 9 clients with income maintenance assistance, and 7 families with immigration assistance. (In terms of total clients served, including secondary benefits, the total number is similar to FY21.) Coordinated HG services mean we quickly avert crises, and clients do not lose precious time having to access services from other agencies where there may be long wait lists or where practitioners lack expertise in ACS cases. Our Community Advocacy Project (CAP) represents parents during an ACS investigation and in attempting to clear or modify maltreatment records with the State Central Register (SCR), to improve parents’ employment opportunities; in FY22, we completed 44 cases of ACS investigation defense and 32 SCR cases. We completed six cycles of multi-week virtual onboarding and training of new staff.

Population Served: General Low Income

Area Served: Manhattan and Queens County

Total IOLA Grant: $60,000

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:
- Total Staff: 122.3
- Lawyers: 55.3
- Paralegals: 9
- Other: 58
Direct Legal Services: Cases

Immigration:
Ms. N is a client who has continued to have the coordinated assistance from HG Immigration staff. She arrived in the US after fleeing Honduras with her sons. On the way, the family suffered intense trauma, including sexual trafficking. After being released from deportation proceedings on humanitarian grounds, Ms. N moved with her boys into a family shelter and tried to obtain counseling. She failed and was psychiatrically hospitalized after telling a shelter worker she felt suicidal. Ms. N was diagnosed with PTSD but the City charged her with neglect and put her boys in foster care. Ms. N then lost her family shelter placement—becoming homeless.

CFR’s FD attorney and social worker advocated from the start for Ms. N to get as many visits as possible with her boys. HG helped her become eligible for a new family shelter and she and her sons continued to receive specialized mental health care. However, while her sons were returned to her, the work on her immigration case continued and only recently concluded: even after regaining custody of her sons, she still had to fight to gain legal status. CFR first appeared in immigration court with Ms. N in 2019 to file for deportation relief. Her trial was set for early 2022, and after her hearing, the immigration judge granted Ms. N relief from deportation. After her 2022 hearing concluded, Ms. N told CFR: “Today I am more than safe with my sons. Thank you for not leaving me alone.”
Other Services: Overview

CFR broadens the scope of our practices and policy efforts to improve the administration of justice and address a variety of challenges faced by families involved in the child welfare and family court systems. The Community Advocacy Project (CAP) provides direct legal representation and social work advocacy for parents in Queens and Manhattan during an ACS investigation, with the goal of connecting parents to services, mitigating any crisis, and avoiding the removal of a child or the filing of a family court prosecution. In CAP we also assist parents in modifying or completely sealing their SCR records. In FY22, we’ve closed 76 cases. CFR continues to be a leader in providing training and technical assistance, particularly in assisting other jurisdictions in replicating our service model. In the reporting period, CFR provided technical assistance to practitioners in California, South Carolina and Ohio.

| Number of People who Benefitted from Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation | 2,621 |
| Community Legal Education | 2,412 |
| Pro Se Assistance | 209 |
Other Services: Technology and Other Innovations

IT improvements begun in FY21 continued in FY 22 and enabled CFR staff to work flexibly and seamlessly with clients and each other during the pandemic. Staff take advantage of Zoom, Google Meet, Skype, and Microsoft Teams to engage in court appearances, virtual meetings, supervision, and training. Staff communicate with clients using the app Dialpad, a cloud-based business phone system; staff are able to text or call using their phone or laptop, transition between devices, record and receive voicemails, engage in multi-party calls, and access a dedicated conference call line. IT staff provided robust support including remote laptop troubleshooting and software installation, training documentation for the Court’s virtual platforms, and access to e-signature and e-fax services to obtain client signatures and client-related documents. IT staff also created designated computer workstations in each office so that any client with WiFi, privacy or other limitations was not compromised in engaging in virtual court appearances or other necessary meetings.

Other Services: Trainings

CFR’s Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) Workgroup, comprised of directors, supervisors and senior staff, which was formed in FY20, formed a training subcommittee that now includes staff in FY22. That group has arranged for educational emails and training presentations that have coincided with Black History month, Hispanic Heritage month and other monthly cultural recognition months. In February 2022 we held a mandatory all-staff in service entitled “Preventing Gender Identity Discrimination and Cultivating an Inclusive Work Culture.” To continue to build our core DEIB competencies, we continued affinity groups for BIPOC staff and staff who identify as white in FY22. CFR is an accredited MCLE and CE provider and we continue to be dedicated to providing consistent and high-quality training to all staff. All new staff attend an intensive, mandatory, introductory and interdisciplinary orientation that lasts 4-5 weeks; we conducted this on six occasions, entirely virtually, during FY22, and on one occasion, opened the training to staff of an upstate IOLA grantee. All have monthly and annual mandatory training and group supervision which also includes presentations from our HG and CAP practices. We have continued to provide this training virtually, and awarded MCLE and CE credits, completing 109 training sessions during the GAR period, including to brand new staff.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

In FY22, CFR worked with 10 pro bono attorneys who provided over 580 hours of pro bono assistance on appeals, contracts and leases, direct representation of clients and support for CFR’s HR department. These attorneys came from Winston Strawn, Seyfarth Shaw LLP, Wilke, Farr and Gallagher, DLA Piper and Norton Rose Fulbright, among other firms. CFR also frequently has Law Grads complete pro bono projects as part of their 50-hour requirement for admission to the Bar. Among the significant achievements of this assistance are the following: Winston-Strawn and CFR finished negotiating its first Collective Bargaining Agreement with UAW-ALAA, which now represents CFR and several IOLA grantees and Norton Rose Fulbright assisted in the successful deportation defense of Ms. N., featured above. During FY22, CFR had 2 law student interns, 3 MSW social work interns and 1 investigations intern.

10 Attorneys volunteered 582 hours

2 Law Students volunteered 824 hours

4 Other Volunteers volunteered 3,024 hours

Significant Collaborations

CFR played an active role in the advocacy of the Immigration Committee of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York, which CFR’s Immigration Supervisor has chaired since 2020. He also co-chairs the ACS Immigration Roundtable which recently released a comprehensive Language Access Policy. CFR’s Executive Director is a member of the New York State Bar Association (NYSBA) Committee on Children and the Law; the Committee drafted a special Report on Racial Justice and Child Welfare and the NYSBA House of Delegates adopted the report. Throughout the reporting period, CFR continued to partner with Bronx Defenders (BxD), Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS), Neighborhood Defender Services (NDS), the Legal Aid Society (LAS), and others in regularly advocating for expanded access to courts as the pandemic continued; much of this advocacy was with the Administrative Judge for the Family Court.
Significant Collaborations

One significant achievement in FY22 was greater access to UCMS, the Court’s central database, which enabled both current and new staff to do more efficient conflict checks at initial appearances, and secure electronic copies of court orders completed after appearances. Along with other IOLA providers and parents, CFR staff testified in October 2021 before the NYS Assembly Standing Committee on Children and Families.

CFR has partnerships with a variety of community based agencies, and the number of these has increased during the reporting period; partnerships include making referrals to one another and conducting or hosting trainings.

Some of our current partners include: Sanctuary for Families, Samaritan Village-Veritas House, Forestdale’s Fathering Initiative, Strong Mothers Program, and ABC Dyadic Therapy program, New York Presbyterian Hospital’s Toddler Infant Parent Program, Safe Horizon, The Door, Steps to End Family Violence, Latin Women in Action, New York Psychotherapy and Counseling Center, Manhattan Family Justice Center, Edwards Mentoring, Green Hope, Odyssey House, Hour Children, and Henry Street Settlement, FEDCAP Women’s Program, Planned Parenthood, Western Queens Counseling Centers, Jewish Board Family of Services, Family Resource Center of Western Queens, Center for Urban Community Services (CUCS), and Queens Defenders. To serve immigrant clients, CFR partners with African Hope Community, American Family Community Services, Arab-American Family Support Center, Sakhi for South Asian Women, NY Asian Women’s Center, Elmcor, Adhikaar, Vida, Chinese Sunshine House, and Sauti Yetu.

Sources of Funding

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City 87%  
State 9%  
Other 3%  
IOLA 1%