Overview of Achievements, 2018-2019

Founded in 1994, The Family Center (TFC) provides legal and social services to New York City individuals whose lives are marked by the intertwined challenges of poverty and illness. During the 2018 – 2019, IOLA grant year, our Legal Wellness Institute (LWI) served over 1,800 people and closed 1,305 matters on their behalf (representing 2,523 household members). On their behalf, we won $627,023 representing back awards and $51,315 ongoing monthly benefits. We won $67,700 in lump sums and settlements and helped clients avoid $5,300 in monthly payments. We saved taxpayers $5,201,790. We resolved 195 court and administrative agency proceedings. This year, we conducted consumer and provider clinics, reaching an additional 891 people. These numbers were delivered by a full-time staff of seven as well as Public Interest Law Fellows, Law Students and pro bono attorneys.

Programmatic Improvements: Expanded Client Eligibility: With assistance from IOLA, we served a wide range of clients and families affected by severe illnesses such as heart disease, neurological disorders and a variety of hereditary and autoimmune diseases. Through aggressive outreach, we saw an increase in unique populations such as those newly poor because of late onset of illnesses such as ALS, Parkinson’s and MS. They desperately need good legal services after disease has not just eroded their physical health, but ongoing and saved income.

Expanded Volunteer Program: To meet this growing need, TFC continued to increase our capability to provide services. We utilized law students, graduates, LLM’s, pro bono attorneys, public interest law fellows and those seeking to fulfill their 50 - hour pro bono commitments pursuant to NYS bar admission requirements. In 2018-2019 year, volunteers alone provided 2,200 hours of service and helped resolve 84 matters on behalf of TFC clients (10 of which were resolved by pro bono attorneys).

Population Served: Low Income Population

Area Served: New York City Metropolitan Area

Total Funding: $ 937,166

Total IOLA Grant: $57,500

Staffing - Full Time Equivalents:

- Total Staff: 7.00
- Lawyers: 5.00
- Paralegals: 2.00
Housing, Income Maintenance) Viktor is a 63-year-old man who has lived in the same rent-stabilized Manhattan apartment since he moved to the U.S. from Czechoslovakia in 1988. He worked as a taxi driver for about 20 years before being diagnosed with prostate cancer in early 2017. He underwent surgery and radiation, and continued to work as many hours as he could pick up. Unfortunately, his tests after his treatment showed that his cancer had not been cured, but was instead spreading. Viktor's doctors prescribed an intensive regimen of medications to try to control his cancer, each with its own side effects. Due to the extreme fatigue and weakness caused by his treatments, Viktor found it difficult to work his usual number of hours. With less money coming in, Viktor started to fall behind on his rent of $1010 per month.

A social worker at Viktor’s hospital referred him to LWI in June, 2017, when she learned that Viktor’s landlord had filed eviction papers against him in housing court. By this time, Viktor had returned to a work schedule that could sustain his ongoing rent, but he was unable to pay the $4000 in arrears he owed his landlord. In addition to representing Viktor in housing court, we advocated with the NYC Human Resources Administration (HRA) to provide a one-time grant to cover Viktor’s rent arrears. HRA provided the grant and Viktor was able to stay in his apartment. Next, we helped Viktor apply for the city’s rent-freeze program for seniors, to give him a better chance of being able to afford his rent in the future. We also provided financial counseling for Viktor to help him adjust his budget to account for his reduced income.

In June 2018, Viktor returned to us because he had been unable to work at all for two months and was falling behind on his rent. Viktor’s health was deteriorating and it was clear that he was not going to be able to return to work. After weighing his options, Viktor decided to apply for Social Security Disability Benefits (SSD). Our staff helped Viktor gather medical evidence and guided him through the application process. Viktor was approved for benefits quickly and started receiving payments in August, 2018. Unfortunately, his benefit amount, about $800 monthly, was less than his rent. Viktor couldn’t afford to stay in his apartment without outside help, and he had no family or friends who could support him. But Viktor couldn’t afford to lose this apartment, either. It was quiet and adequate for his needs, inexpensive and rent-regulated, and most importantly, it was only a few blocks away from his oncologist’s office.

In October, 2018, Viktor’s landlord took him to housing court again. With Viktor’s approval, we asked the court to refer Viktor to Adult Protective Services (APS), with the goal of making him eligible for a very small rent subsidy program called SEPS (now called City FHEPS). This HRA-administered subsidy program helps some vulnerable adults stay in their homes by subsidizing their rents on an ongoing basis. After months of advocacy with HRA and with the court to delay the eviction proceedings, Viktor was approved for the SEPS program in February, 2019. The program paid his rent arrears and will continue to subsidize his rent indefinitely. Viktor now pays 30% of his Social Security income towards his rent, and SEPS pays the remainder directly to Viktor’s landlord.
**Other Services...**

**Number of People Benefitted by**
**Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7,601 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Legal Education</td>
<td>3,390 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro Se Assistance</td>
<td>911 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Assistance</td>
<td>3,300 people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Other Legal Related Services: Overview**

Each year, TFC conducts substantive clinics and workshops at numerous local area hospitals, CBO’s, hospices. TFC’s Legal Wellness Institute conducts 15-20 presentations each year throughout the five boroughs. When working with a population defined by illness and which is remarkably difficult to access, off-site group outreach becomes a crucial mechanism to engage with clients and providers. Our legal clinics have been successful not only in assisting the public on a range of issues through legal education, but also in the recruitment of new clients and helping to establish strong referral relationships with providers. Our clinics this year reached 891 consumers and providers Educating providers to issue-spot common legal problems gives them valuable resource information for their practice and helps them to make appropriate referrals. This year we conducted provider workshops at SUNY Downstate, CancerCare, and many, many others. Finally, our pro se workshops help clients do transactional work themselves and they complete lifetime planning documents, public assistance, food stamps, Medicaid applications and child-only grant applications.

**Other Legal Related Services: Examples**

On January 16, 2019, LWI was invited to hold a legal clinic for patients at Brightpoint Health, a Federally Qualified Health Center located in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn. Brightpoint’s patients typically struggle with poverty and housing instability as well as medical and mental health conditions. Approximately 70% of Brightpoint’s patients are homeless, and about 25% of Brightpoint’s patients are HIV positive. https://brightpointhealth.org/our-impact. An LWI attorney presented to a group of 35 patients in Brightpoint’s community room, providing an overview of LWI’s services and answering general questions about housing and benefits issues. After the presentation, three LWI staff members met onsite individually with interested clinic attendees to provide advice and counsel, complete advance directives, and conduct legal intakes. We served about 12 people in individual sessions at this clinic.

On February 28, 2019, we conducted a presentation in Spanish for a LatinaShare support group at the Mt. Sinai Dubin Breast Center (“Dubin”) in Manhattan, New York. The presentation covered Public Assistance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Social Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Medicare, Medicaid, and Medicaid Cancer Treatment Program. Most people who attended the presentation had previously received, applied, or currently received at least one of the public benefits mentioned and had many questions regarding the process, eligibility, and appealing a decision. During the presentation patients participated and spoke about their experience with the different kinds of public benefits institutions. After the presentation, people asked more specific questions we conducted intake for several of the attendees.
All LWI staff and volunteers receive appropriate training in our major practice areas and everyone, including the Director of Legal Services, maintains an active client caseload. Under our Special Practice Orders, and with intense supervision, law students also maintain a caseload. All attorneys are well-versed in the agency’s practice areas and complete far more than the required CLE per year and all have received trial training. They have had trials in courts throughout the city and all have very high win percentages.

Further, annually, The Family Center hosts a full-day Board retreat that encompasses a review of governance and fiduciary responsibilities, as well as in-depth fundraising training. Board Committees include the Leadership Development & Board Recruitment Committee which vets Board candidates and organizes the annual retreat, along with other recruitment and training activities. Many Board members also come to The Family Center with experience and training. Finally, The Family Center hosts a thorough orientation for all new Board members in order support Directors as they become familiar with our agency, mission, work and finances. Finally, Last year TFC completed a year-long Quality Improvement project to improve agency practice with the National Council for Behavioral Health's 7 domains of trauma-informed care. As part of this project staff received a full day of training on trauma from an NCHB expert as well as a one-day training on Mental Health First Aid provided by NYC DOH staff. Much of the project's work has been focused on establishing infrastructure for on-going quality improvement activities, which are implemented through domain-specific workgroups. Workgroup membership includes representatives of all agency departments and majority of legal staff participated in at least one of the four workgroups organized during the course of the project. These workgroups provide leadership opportunity as well as opportunity to learn in-depth about topics important to successful work with vulnerable, trauma-impacted community members.

Good outcomes start at the beginning of client engagement. After intake and assessment, client data is entered into our Evolv Client Case Management Database which has automated assessments, tracking, service alerts, case planning, referral outcomes and reporting capabilities. New cases are presented at a weekly intake meeting. Respecting ethical guidelines, an action plan to assist clients and their families is decided by a community of professionals acting in concert. Health, financial management, mental well-being and legal work are all considered at the same time. Priorities are set, tasks assigned. Working in conjunction with TFC’s QA and IT teams, the Director has developed and frequently reviews on-going real-time reports from our client record and Evolv data collection system. Our data keeps us connected to client legal issues and to health and economic security challenges faced by the families we serve, and permits the Director to monitor case progress, activities and alerts.
Other Services

Significant Collaborations

Collaborations are crucial to meeting the complex needs of our clients, and we put great effort in establishing and maintaining our strong connections throughout the community. We have linkage agreements, MOU’s and referral relationships with 50 providers. Last year, we received client referrals from 21 local hospitals. Our staff also participates in a variety of community coalitions and maintains strong working relationships with colleagues throughout the city. Further, general outreach presentations and community tabling events are conducted by our outreach staff across the city. Our collaborative network and outreach generated 500 word-of-mouth referrals. For TFC’s Legal Wellness Institute, our most significant collaboration is with TFC, itself. TFC is a unique multidisciplinary agency in New York City that serves thousands of low income, ill adults and children every year. Our programs include social work, case management and medical case management, early childhood intervention and support programs, research, education and a fully licensed Article 31 Mental Health Clinic. Approximately a third of our clients and families are served by more than one program at TFC. Referrals to the Legal Wellness Institute are made from all segments of the agency. TFC’s outreach staff attends hundreds of events throughout the year. Thousands of people hear of our services and contact us as a result of our being a frequent presence at coalition meetings, street events, consumer fairs and other community events.

Hospitals: The nature of our work means that TFC’s Legal Wellness Institute is a frequent visitor to local area hospitals. We work throughout the five boroughs and receive referrals from dozens of hospitals across the city. As mentioned above, we also conduct consumer and provider clinics at a number of hospitals. Our most significant collaborations are with Memorial Sloan Kettering, NYU-Langone and Bellevue, Columbia and New York Presbyterian, Jamaica Hospital, Elmhurst Hospital, Mt. Sinai, SUNY Downstate, Montefiore, Maimonides and Lincoln Hospitals. We provide services at the bedsides of patients at those hospitals as well as receive referrals on an on-going basis.

CBO’s: This same level of engagement exists with our non-hospital CBO community. From cancer-support groups to council-persons’ offices, our ties to the New York City non-profit community are strong and we are known city-wide as an agency that can handle unique cases for clients in the midst of considerable personal and medical distress. Almost all of our cases are time-sensitive. We collaborate with other CBO’s with like-minded missions and who work with marginalized client populations. Our most significant collaborators are Community Healthcare Network, CAMBA, New York State Kinship Care Navigator, the American Cancer Society, CancerCare, Harlem United, VNS, LatinaShare, Atlas DIY, The Shield, YAI and others. Finally, we receive a large number of referrals directly from the Courts.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

This year we hosted 14 volunteers of the various types described below. **Law Student Interns:** For the last several years, we’ve hosted 2-3 law student interns per semester and during the summer. “Full time,” law students conduct client intake, home visits, conduct research assignments, draft motions and memoranda of law, work with clients on benefits, housing and administrative law issues.

**50-Hour Law Student Interns:** With IOLA funding, we developed a program to host law students for 50-hour commitments pursuant to bar admission requirements. Our 50-hour volunteers – some students and some recent graduates – represent a unique and new resource for TFC. Highly enthusiastic and with significant time commitments the challenge is to bring them up to speed quickly and have them engage in projects rapidly. At The Family Center, where regular business hours don’t really apply to our client population, this is not a hard challenge to overcome. Volunteers have conducted client intakes and case assessments, helped clients execute advance directives, accompanied staff attorneys to court, assisted in conducting client workshops in public benefits and housing rights, written orders to show cause, memoranda and final divorce papers and more – all in the space of 50 hours. The feedback is that it was certainly an education for them. Also, it is an education for us in how even short-term commitments, enthusiastically given, can yield outsize results for clients and their families. The majority of volunteers stay on to do more than just 50 hours. That unintended good fortune is a tremendous asset to the agency and to TFC’s clients.

---

**Pro Bono Statistics**

- **Attorneys:** 2 Volunteer 200 Hours
- **Law Students:** 12 Volunteers 2000 Hours

---

**Sources Of Funding**

- **Iola Grant:** $57,500
- **Foundations:** $448,000
- **State Funding:** $256,666
- **Other:** $175,000
- **Total:** $937,166