



NYRAG

VOICES

FROM THE FRONT LINE

PROFILES OF OUR NONPROFIT PARTNERS

LIFT (Legal Information for Families Today)

LIFT (Legal Information for Families Today) was launched twelve years ago by young lawyers who saw a desperate need to help families adrift in the Family Court system get basic legal information about their rights and responsibilities. Setting up a desk once a week in the lobby of Manhattan Family Court, these lawyers provided the first on-site source of information for litigants. The response was overwhelming and revealed a need for this kind of assistance that was far greater than they had originally realized.

Today, LIFT remains the only nonprofit organization in New York City directly addressing the challenges faced by families in the Family Courts by enabling them to make informed legal decisions and successfully navigate the legal system. They accomplish this through:

- the operation of **Court-based Education & Information Sites** located in the lobbies and waiting areas of the Brooklyn, Bronx, Manhattan, and Queens Family Courts, as well as the Brooklyn Criminal Court, which offer on-the-spot legal information, referrals, and written resources
- a **Legal Education Program** for grandparents who have taken custody of their grandchildren
- their **Legal Information Hotline**, which in 2007 served the needs of over 9,000 people—an average of 35 calls a day

- the publication of twenty-three **Multilingual Legal Resource Guides**, including an activity book for children. These guides are available in Chinese, English, Haitian/Creole, Korean, Russian, and Spanish.

LIFT also uses its frontline experience and extensive data to facilitate system-wide reform of the courts and public agencies.

“Driven by the results of rigorous and ongoing outcome measurement, LIFT’s programs offer a high-quality, cost-effective response to a demonstrated need,” said Melissa M. Beck, LIFT’s Executive Director. “We have a diverse portfolio of supporters, which includes both private and public sources as well as numerous individuals. We have a dedicated Board, a talented staff of

- ▶ There are only 51 Family Court judges citywide who are responsible for hearing the **250,000 new cases** brought before the court each year.
- ▶ A staggering 92 percent of the nearly 55,000 court-involved families LIFT serves annually are proceeding in Family Court **without the benefit of a lawyer**.
- ▶ One in ten of the people that LIFT serves are **monolingual Spanish-speaking**.



“The Clark Foundation has supported LIFT since 2005, as it has improved the lives of children and families involved in the Family Court system by offering court-based information services, operating community-based education programs, and by fostering public/private partnerships to benefit Family Court operations. In the process, we have seen a small organization grow significantly, with great attention to its outcomes and professional staff.”

— Charles H. Hamilton,
Executive Director, The Clark Foundation

more than twenty, and a budget of two million dollars. We are proud of the recent growth of our programs and look forward to future innovation and accomplishment.”

LIFT’s newest program, the Family Legal Center (FLC), was launched in September 2007 to provide a broader range of services to parents representing themselves in child support, custody, and visitation cases. A team of paralegals, program associates, and social workers work one-on-one with participants to prepare them for their court appearances; improve their relationships with their children and co-parent; and achieve greater economic self-sufficiency. The first of its kind in New York City, the FLC has already enjoyed positive outcomes and is on target to far exceed its annual goals.

Damon (not his real name) is just one FLC success story. Damon first came to the FLC frustrated by the slow progress of his Family Court case and despairing at the deteriorating relationship between himself and his

child. He had been going to court nearly every month for a year in an ongoing attempt to increase visitation with his son. Damon’s initial court order limited his visitation to alternate Saturdays from 9 AM to noon—too little time to develop and maintain a meaningful relationship with his child. He began taking advantage of the FLC’s services, receiving individualized court preparation from a program associate, including mock court appearances, which helped him attend his court dates in a calm and prepared manner.

The results were almost immediate. Appearing in court for the first time since joining the FLC, Damon’s visitation was increased by six hours per visit, and soon overnight stays were added. Most recently, a final order granted Damon full weekend visitation with his son every other weekend. With guidance from the FLC, he has also been in full compliance with his child support order and has been pursuing a degree in Internet Technology. Overjoyed by the sea change in his life, Damon wrote a letter to FLC staff, thanking them for “changing his life.”

LIFT meets families at a fragile point in their lives. Facing a daunting and complex system without support can often exacerbate the crises that brought them to court in the first place, decreasing the chances of positive resolution and a return to stability. However, with the involvement of LIFT, these very crises can also be an impetus to positive change. Drawing on a powerful combination of legal expertise and knowledge of how to connect with those they serve, LIFT uses its legal help as a starting point for additional efforts to fortify vulnerable families and promote the well-being of children. ▲



NYRAG Members That Fund LIFT Include:

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- Laura B. Vogler Foundation

To learn more about LIFT, please contact:

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Recommended Restaurants Near LIFT

Landmarc
 French-Italian Bistro
 179 West Broadway
 212-343-3883
www.landmarc-restaurant.com

Walker's
 American
 16 North Moore Street
 212-941-0142



Voices from the Front Line spotlights exemplary grantees of one or more NYRAG members. For more information on a particular grantee, please contact them directly. We rely on you to conduct your own due diligence; NYRAG has not done so. We encourage our members to suggest their own grantees by emailing Maia Goss at mgoss@nyrag.org.