Annual Report 2017

Legal Information for Families Today

Empowering Families to Access Justice in New York’s Family Courts

OUR STORY

ONE FAMILY AT A TIME
A message from Cathy Cramer
CEO, LIFT

Dear Friends of LIFT,

I joined LIFT in February 2017 as CEO, and I am thrilled to be heading this incredible organization.

At LIFT, our mission is to help families in deep distress by giving them tools to resolve legal conflicts so they can move forward and make better decisions about their family’s future.

Every day in Family Court, our lawyers share knowledge and resources with families who need to know their legal rights and options. We equip parents and grandparents to become the best self-advocates they can be on issues of child support, custody and visitation, and domestic violence.

We also help families in the communities they live in so they do not have to come to court to get LIFT’s services. Through our Helpline, intensive Parenting Classes, and community legal clinics, LIFT helps parents gain new life skills so that they can reunite with their children after court intervention.

Now more than ever, we need organizations like LIFT, and people like you. We work with every family member who needs us – regardless of income, race, ethnicity, gender or immigration status.

This is a very exciting time for LIFT. Soon, we’ll be launching new initiatives that will greatly increase the number of litigants served and deepen the support we offer.

We could not do any of this without YOU – our legal and court partners, our advocacy allies, our social service counterparts and donors who understand that family is humanity’s most enduring social institution, and that sometimes parents need support to do the best that they can do.

Thank you for being part of OUR family and for all you do to support LIFT.

With appreciation,

Cathy A. Cramer

Launched in 1996, Legal Information for Families Today (LIFT) is the only non-profit organization in New York dedicated to empowering people to self-advocate in Family Court, where over 80% of litigants do not have a lawyer. Our mission is to enhance access to justice for children and families by providing legal information, community education, and compassionate guidance, while promoting system-wide reform of the courts and public agencies.

In our nearly 22-year history, LIFT has evolved from a single family law information table in one courthouse to an essential, multi-faceted, city- and state-wide source of legal information, advice and support for court-involved families.

The Need

Each day, New Yorkers crowd Family Courts, often waiting hours to present cases fundamental to the well-being of children and families, such as custody, visitation, child support, and protection in domestic violence cases. Despite the importance of the matters being resolved in the courthouse, most parents cannot afford to hire a lawyer and, therefore, must represent themselves in Family Court. Without a clear understanding of their legal rights and options, families lose what little opportunity they have to secure a prompt, appropriate response to their problems. LIFT provides families with the information and guidance they need to address these challenges and secure positive outcomes for themselves and their children.
Thalia, an immigrant mother, was in tears when she came to LIFT. Her husband had abandoned her, and she was anxious that a Family Court judge would think that she was a “bad wife” that she had done something to make her husband leave her and their five-year-old daughter. She urgently needed help in securing child support but she had no experience with court and didn’t even have her estranged husband’s new address. Aleka, LIFT’s Bronx attorney, calmed her down, talked her through her case, and helped Thalia prepare for her court appearance.

Thalia’s day in court arrived, and to her surprise, her husband showed up with family members and a private attorney. She was distraught, intimidated, and considered spending money she didn’t have to hire a lawyer of her own. Aleka assured Thalia that she was capable of advocating for herself and that she wouldn’t be alone, as Aleka would be sitting right behind her in court.

Thalia confidently represented herself in Family Court and achieved her goal: an order for child support. Thalia’s husband retaliated by filing for custody of their daughter. She came straight to LIFT, relying on extensive support in developing her case. Her hard work paid off when the judge awarded her sole custody of her daughter!

“LIFT empowered me to represent myself. Aleka is such a sweetheart! I wouldn’t have made it this far without her helping me every step of the way.”

Who we serve

FAMILY MEMBER

Mother 44%
Father 36%
Self 2%
Other Relative 13%
Non-Family Member 5%

HAS ATTORNEY

No 95%
Yes 5%

The impact your gifts made in 2017

44,479 questions answered about child support
22,246 questions answered about custody
6 new Legal Resource Guides
14,400 helpline phone calls
41,603 questions answered about court procedure
10,517 questions answered about visitation
14,100 on-the spot answers in the courthouse
9,529 questions answered about domestic violence & orders of protection

1,240 in-depth consultations
80 parenting course graduates
14,100 on-the spot answers in the courthouse
22% (6,458)
17% (5,132)
13% (3,744)
29% (8,744)
5% (1,384)
11% (3,186)
17% (5,147)
11% (3,166)
17% (5,135)
4% (1,116)

OUTSIDE NYC
STATEN ISLAND
BRONX
QUEENS
BROOKLYN

Who we serve

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Father 36%
Self 2%
Other Relative 13%
Non-Family Member 5%

HAS ATTORNEY

No 95%
Yes 5%
When Jonathan found out he was going to be a Dad, he was thrilled and looking forward to co-parenting. But near the end of the pregnancy, his daughter’s mother suddenly moved to another state, where she gave birth without telling him. Jonathan was devastated and went to the LIFT office in Family Court to find out about his rights as a parent.

There he met LIFT lawyer, Monroe, who told Jonathan that he had to establish paternity in order to begin his relationship with his daughter. She prepped him on what to expect in the courtroom, all the legal language the judge would use, and the paperwork he had to fill out.

When Jonathan’s DNA test came back positive, the judge established him as the legal father. Monroe helped him get visitation so he could finally meet his little girl.

It has been a long road for Jonathan and his daughter. She now lives with him permanently, because her mother couldn’t take care of her full-time. Last summer, the judge granted him full custody!

“I was willing to work hard to exercise my rights and make sure that my baby was well taken care of, but I couldn’t have figured out the complicated laws in two different states. I depended on the LIFT team. Without LIFT, I wouldn’t have a relationship with my daughter.”

Teneka was referred to LIFT’s 12-week Parenting Program due to an active case with the NYC Administration for Children’s Services (ACS). In the parenting course, LIFT’s social worker, Noemi, helped Teneka and her classmates grapple with issues such as emotional management, co-parenting and financial planning. After the first few workshops, she made such great progress that ACS closed her case halfway through the course! Teneka continued voluntarily attending LIFT’s workshops because she felt they helped her grow as a mother.

“Parenting Class taught me about child development, which helped me understand my kids better and take better care of them. LIFT helped me understand how to make and save money, and gave me some resources that made life much more manageable for me and my children. LIFT’s Parenting Program was a blessing.”
What’s Next for LIFT?

Thanks to your support, LIFT will be expanding our services in 2018:

- After several years of planning and training, LIFT will be including legal advice in our repertoire of services. In certain cases, our lawyers will be able to advise specific courses of action, in addition to legal information, to help clients reach their legal goals.

- We are piloting an innovative online platform, Family Legal Connection, which combines videoconferencing and document-sharing technology to enable Family Court litigants to get legal advice without traveling to the courthouse. In partnership with pro bono attorneys, LIFT will be able to serve many more parents and families who urgently need support.

- We are adapting our Legal Resource Guides so that litigants across New York state can use them to access our high quality family law information.

Taken together, these new initiatives will greatly deepen LIFT’s impact, and the impact of your gifts.

How can you help?

Support LIFT’s efforts to empower families to be their own best advocates. Make a gift online at www.liftonline.org/about/donate or contact our Development Office at 646-613-6933 x203.

Interested in volunteering in Family Court or with Family Legal Connection? Contact Devi Patel at DPatel@LIFTonline.org

Follow LIFT on Facebook and LinkedIn at Legal Information for Families Today and on Twitter @LIFTonline and help spread the word.

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Financials
Fiscal Year 2017 (October 1, 2016-September 30, 2017)

**Operating Revenues**

- Government Grants: $1,412,452
- Individuals and Foundations: $280,528
- In-Kind Contributions: $43,488
- Special Events: $344,594
- Interest/Other Income: $5,372
- **TOTAL REVENUE**: $2,086,434

**Operating Expenses**

- Legal/Program Services: $1,395,703
- Management and General: $194,638
- **Fundraising**: $265,590
- **TOTAL EXPENSES**: $1,855,931

**Change in Net Assets**: $230,040
- Total Assets: $1,229,808
- Total Liabilities: $79,265
- Total Net Assets: $1,150,543