

Erica

Erica is a domestic violence victim who came to CFR after she was arrested for leaving her seven-year-old son, Victor, alone in her apartment one evening. Despite the fact that Erica had no mental health or substance abuse problems and had steady employment, protective services placed her son in a foster home in another borough, meaning he could no longer attend his school or after school program, and making it very hard for them to see each other. The Family Court had scheduled her case for two months later and her court appointed attorney told her there was nothing to be done to have Victor come home sooner. But CFR took her case. We worked diligently with protective services on a plan to permit Victor to return to her in three weeks, with additional services to help Erica identify appropriate babysitting and other supportive services to keep her family safe.



“ Kids do well when their families thrive, and they suffer when their families struggle. We are learning — at long last — that helping disadvantaged children means strengthening and supporting their families. ”

— DOUGLAS W. NELSON, PRESIDENT, THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

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Our Core Values

At the Center for Family Representation, we are vigilant about strengthening parents so they can build safe and healthy families. We want to keep family court and child welfare professionals vigilant, too. We know that competent, inter-disciplinary advocacy for parents helps both systems find faster, more effective ways to address a family's needs. It also gives children the chance to grow up with the people and communities that matter most to them.



Quotes:

- 1 Blake, Sweetie. New York City Council Hearing, February 1999. *For Parents By Parents*, Issue 10, Spring 2003, p. 4
- 2 Hicks, Wunika. "I Lost My Brother to Adoption," *Youth Communication*, issue CW-7, p. 8.

The Center for Family Representation

Effective Advocacy for Parents
Strong Families for Children



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“ I didn’t have any idea what was happening, and I was very much afraid, because the most important thing in my life had just been lost. ”¹



“ CFR ventures beyond traditional problem-solving approaches to forge solutions for families that bridge child welfare and family court — that means lasting value for New York’s children. ”

— GAIL B. NAYOWITH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CITIZENS’ COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN OF NEW YORK, INC.

Every Family Struggles from Time to Time

For most families, struggles with day care, school, mental health problems or even addiction don’t lead to family break-up. Relatives step in. Resources are located. Options are plentiful.

For disadvantaged parents in impoverished communities, the equation is very different. For them, a crisis can mean that protective services removes their children and places them in foster care. It often leads to months or even years trying to navigate the family court system to put their family back together. It happens because child welfare agencies and family court are simply overwhelmed and because too often parents are not offered help until their family is broken apart.

Since 2002, the **Center for Family Representation** (CFR) has worked to change that equation. **Our mission is to ensure that every family that can remain safely together has the opportunity to do so.** We do it by providing high quality, free legal representation to parents, by training practitioners on best practices to support families, by challenging systemic factors that keep families apart and by conducting research to demonstrate that our practices can save the public money and—more importantly—**preserve families.**

Gloria

Gloria is a single mother who came to CFR when she got a letter threatening that she would be charged with neglect for failing to address her daughter’s severe emotional problems. In fact, Gloria had been trying unsuccessfully to get special education services for her child from her school and was unhappy with the insufficient help it was willing to provide. A mental health agency that Gloria had sought help from called in a report after Gloria told them that the hours of her new job would not allow her to continue to work with them. Gloria tried unsuccessfully to find another program.

Our CFR social worker and parent advocate intervened with protective services to explain the situation and convinced them not to file a neglect case against Gloria. Our social worker also helped Gloria finally get the special services her daughter needed from the Department of Education, as well as in-home services that did not jeopardize Gloria’s employment and helped her daughter thrive.

“ I didn’t want to be separated from my mother. She tried so hard to keep us together. ”²

Strong Families for Children

When any of us hear about a parent neglecting a child, we react with shock and sadness...even disgust. But the stories that make headlines do not reflect the situation of most families who face an investigation by the child welfare system. Most of these have parents who care deeply for their children but may be coping with domestic violence, homelessness, a lost job, or a lack of knowledge about available treatment or help.

The financial consequences of inappropriate removals and long stays in foster care are staggering. New York City spends hundreds of millions of dollars annually on foster care, which generally costs four times more than services for a family whose children are at home. **And the length of stay in foster care for City children far exceeds national averages.** But the human costs, especially to children, are incalculable. A removal means that a child must cope with the trauma of separation from parents and sometimes siblings, extended family, friends, school teachers, churches, teams. **Lost connections and compromised relationships impact children for a lifetime.**

But it doesn’t have to happen this way. With quick, early intervention and well-coordinated services, families can be strong...**for the children who depend on them.**

Effective Advocacy for Parents

CFR was founded after many child welfare and legal experts called for an agency to provide high quality legal representation to needy parents. They recognized the link between better representation and more effective and efficient justice for families.

But CFR is not a traditional legal services agency. We don’t wait for a case to be filed in court. We intervene with a family as soon as a risk to a child is identified. We partner with a host of community organizations in reaching these families early and often avoid both foster care and unnecessary litigation. We were the first legal agency to take referrals directly from protective services.

Our legal teams include social workers and parent advocates. Our parent advocates have been through the system, so they can provide the kind of support only someone who’s been there can.

We not only train attorneys but also caseworkers, judges and service providers to enhance the systems’ ability to build on best practices in a coordinated way.

We advocate at the city, state and national level. Whenever possible, we problem solve by partnering with the very same parties we may litigate against: foster care agencies, law guardians and prosecutors. We bring parents and community agencies to the table to break the code on long-standing problems that undermine families.

All of this makes the Center for Family Representation unique. It also makes us effective.