

# The Center for Family Representation

## 2013 Report to the Community



**At CFR, we believe that every family matters.** Our mission is to keep families together—we work to prevent children from entering the foster care system or to keep their time in care to a minimum. CFR clients receive the services of our innovative team model consisting of a lawyer, a social worker, and a parent advocate. Thank you for supporting our important work in 2013.

### Our Results

- Since our founding, we have served nearly 5,000 families with nearly 7,000 children.
- In 2013, CFR served 2,100 families in Manhattan & Queens. More than 1,000 were new clients.
- We continued our record of keeping 57% of our clients' children out of foster care entirely.
- For children who entered and left care, their median length stay was just 0.9 months. This is significantly shorter than the New York City median of 5.5 months and the New York State median of nearly 17 months.
- Our model also ensures that just 7% of our family's children re-entered foster care within one year of returning home, compared to the New York State rate of 15%. This means that due to the vast majority of our children stay home with their families permanently.
- CFR's services cost an average of \$6,500 per family, regardless of the number of children—in comparison, the cost to keep one child in foster care for a year in New York City is \$36,000. As a result, our services generated taxpayer savings of more than \$9 million per year.

### Our Families

**CFR teams help each client overcome their unique challenges.** In addition to quality providing representation in court, we advocate for our clients in the community, helping them create to comprehensive service plans that address their individual needs and utilize the best, most appropriate services. Of the more than 2,100 families we served over the past year...

- 100% live in poverty
- 93% are people of color
- 76% are women
- 42% are single parents
- 34% of those under age 25 have experienced foster care or are currently in care
- 25% have a mental health diagnosis
- 21% are survivors of domestic violence
- 20% are immigrants

## Training & Technical Assistance

**Each year, CFR trains hundreds of practitioners on strategies for dramatically reducing foster care stays and on our innovative team model.** Our training program has increased significantly—we train professionals around the country, including attorneys for parents and children, social workers, mental health and medical practitioners, child welfare caseworkers, and family court judges.

- In 2013, CFR facilitated 14 training sessions for more than 630 practitioners around New York City, New York State, and the Nation. Training highlights include:
- In July, as part of our Cornerstone Institute training program, CFR hosted 12 child welfare practitioners from New Mexico for a 3-day workshop. The participants are part of a pilot program that aims to replicate CFR's team model of pairing attorneys and social workers to shorten lengths of foster care for children involved in Family Court proceedings. Attendees included lawyers for parents and children, social workers, court administrators, and a Family court judge. CFR Deputy Director Michele Cortese also traveled to New Mexico in November for a follow up training and technical assistance.
- In September, Michele and four CFR Parent Advocates trained 27 new Family Court judges in White Plains, New York, as a part of the State's Court Improvement Project. The Parent Advocates shared their experiences as child welfare professionals and their involvement in the Family Court.
- In November, Michele and CFR Social Work Supervisor Chloe Junge traveled to North Carolina to train participants from eight Southern states on our Cornerstone Advocacy approach and best practices for parent representation through a federally-funded court improvement initiative. Participants included attorneys for parents and children, family court judges, volunteers from Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), child welfare workers, and parents.

## Policy & Advocacy

**Our direct service work with indigent families informs all of our policy work.** We provide expert commentary on legislation and policy initiatives that affect vulnerable families on city, state, and national levels. Frequently recognized for excellence, our staff members serve in leadership positions on many commissions and task forces.

- CFR Executive Director Susan Jacobs is a member of the New York State Bar Association's Task Force on Family Court. In January, the group published its final report, which provides solutions for improving the Family Court system in New York State.
- In March, CFR's results were used as evidence to support the federal funding of parent representation efforts nationwide. Congresswoman Gwen Moore (D-WI) reintroduced the Enhancing Quality of Legal Representation Act, H.R. 1096 (113th Congress), with the support of CFR and other child welfare experts.
- In May, Susan Jacobs and Board Member Martin Guggenheim published an article, "A New National Movement in Parent Representation," in the *Clearinghouse Review* of the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law. The article discussed the national movement for quality parent representation and the success of CFR's model in a special issue celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Gideon v. Wainwright*.

- In August, Martin Guggenheim was the primary author of an Amicus Brief filed on behalf of 18 national child welfare organizations in the case of *Adoptive Couple v. Baby Girl*. The case was heard by the United States Supreme Court to determine whether custody of "Baby Veronica" would go to her potential adoptive parents or her biological father, a member of the Cherokee Nation.

## Pro Bono

- With the help of pro bono attorneys from Proskauer Rose LLP, in late December 2012, CFR won an important appeal clarifying the Family Court's role in reunifying families. CFR filed the appeal on behalf of a client who had been barred from being reunited from her children due to a criminal court order of protection, despite the Family Court judge believing reunification was in the children's best interests. This important decision will help lay the groundwork for more families to stay together.
- In September, pro bono counsel from Chadbourne & Parke LLP argued a successful appeal on behalf of CFR's client, who had been wrongfully charged with neglect after her teenage daughter was untruthful about her whereabouts. The appeal overturned the neglect finding in Family Court, ensuring that our client's career in child care would not be affected.

## Events & Volunteering

- CFR hosted our annual Celebrating Families gala at the Grand Hyatt New York on October 7<sup>th</sup>. More than 350 friends of CFR attended and helped to raise more than \$405,000—our most successful gala to date. We are thankful to our event co-chairs, Lori A. Lancaster and Amy S. Leder, for their leadership. CFR presented Howard Seife of Chadbourne & Parke LLP with the Legal Champion Award; Bain Capital Community Partnership with the Corporate Leadership Award; and Michelle James, a former CFR client and inspirational mother, with the Spirit Award.
- Our Junior Board hosted Summer in the City, their signature fundraising event for young professionals, at the Hotel Chantelle on July 31<sup>st</sup>. The event welcomed nearly 100 guests who helped to raise more than \$22,000 to support our work.
- CFR welcomed volunteers from Goldman Sachs to our Queens office to help build shelving and organize the new donation closet, which stores baby clothing and supplies to give to clients in need. Volunteers from Morgan Stanley visited our Manhattan office to help organize the donation closet there. These efforts enable our staff to quickly find supplies for families who have recently been reunified, but often need extra help getting back on their feet.
- On December 6<sup>th</sup>, CFR's Junior Board will host a Holiday Party in our Manhattan office for our families, who will enjoy snacks, crafts, and a visit from Santa. We'll also provide more than 100 children with gift bags filled with toys, books, games, and warm clothing, bringing joy to our families in the most need this holiday season.

**Thank you for generously supporting CFR's work throughout the year. For more information, please visit [www.cfrny.org](http://www.cfrny.org)**

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