

LAWYERS FOR THE PEOPLE

ENSURING KIDS GET THE SUPPORT THEY NEED TO SUCCEED IN SCHOOL AND LIFE



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ANNUAL REPORT

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OUR MISSION:

Lawyers for the People's ("L4P") mission is to provide wrap-around legal representation to low and moderate income D.C. residents. L4P focuses its advocacy efforts on D.C. youth and its families. L4P works to reverse the school to prison pipeline by asserting and defending student's rights and by forming community and school coalitions to support each and every student it represents.

OUR PHILOSOPHY:

Lawyers for the People (L4P) believes children need to be in school to learn. L4P works hard to ensure all children have access to the supports and services necessary for him or her to reach his or her dreams. [Examples of appropriate interventions include mentors, tutors, therapists, anger management classes, life skills training, job training, jobs, and many more interventions which are far more beneficial to both the child and society than alternative interventions often used like school suspensions and locking kids up.] L4P knows all kids can flourish if given the proper supports to develop the various skills needed to succeed in life. L4P works hard to enforce each child's rights and educate each child about his or her rights and how to best self advocate.

Our Work:

Special Education: Lawyers for the People (L4P) attorneys ensure that the legal rights of children with disabilities are being enforced. L4P also works with the student's family, school support team, and community support team to ensure that the student has access to all the services he or she needs to succeed in life. If such support teams are not engaged with the student, or have not been formed, then L4P attorneys help build and support such teams.

Delinquency: Lawyers for The People (L4P) attorneys accept court appointments to represent children charged with delinquency matters in D.C. Superior Court. L4P understands the traumatic and stigmatizing effects court contacts can have on a young person. Therefore, we work to minimize a child's contact with the criminal justice system. We also understand that Juvenile Delinquency Court is designed with rehabilitation in mind. Therefore, we zealously advocate for appropriate services, such as mentors and tutors, for every youth we work with who is under court supervision.

Persons in Need of Supervision: Runaway children are a scary problem in D.C. and the issue has even received national news attention. Lawyers for the People (L4P) attorneys accept court appointments to represent children who are in the court system for running away or for not attending school (truancy). L4P works hard to identify the root causes of the running and build appropriate supports to minimize such behavior.

Abuse and Neglect: Lawyers for The People attorneys accept court appointments to advocate for children that are in the Abuse and Neglect court system at D.C. Superior Court.

COMMUNITY NEED

The Problem:

Students from District of Columbia public schools are performing well below the national average across subject matters. For example, the 2017 National Assessment of Educational Progress, released in April 2018, reported that only 20% of D.C. eighth grade students scored proficient or better in reading, and only 21% proficient in math. Many of the tested schools are located in neighborhoods with the highest unemployment and lowest incomes in the city. Without the capacity to properly address the unique needs of students in our communities, schools often rely on excessive school exclusions, which often result in a “push-out” of students from schools to the juvenile justice system, often referred to as the “school to prison pipeline.” L4P works hard to enforce each child's educational rights and to ensure every child receives a quality public education at no cost to their families.

Further, justice-involved youth overwhelmingly suffer tremendous educational deficits. Specifically, they disproportionately attend failing schools, they typically read and do math below grade level, and they have experienced expulsion, suspension and dropout prior to being adjudicated. Furthermore, these youth face “many barriers to completing their education while they are held in facilities (and once they are released), which may be why the majority of youth—66 percent—do not return to school after release from secure custody.”¹ More than 90 percent of youth in the care of the D.C. Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) have an IEP, a mental health diagnosis, or both.² On average, these students test at the fourth- or fifth-grade level in English and math and earn little to no credits towards graduating high school.³

Justice-involved youth need access to quality, evidence-based academic services that improve literacy, enhance high school graduation rates, and increase the likelihood of post-secondary educational attainment or successfully entering the workforce. Equal access to quality public education allows the opportunity for youth to develop their own human capital, making themselves marketable in a capitalistic economic system.⁴

Lawyers for the People attorneys provide youth defendants, families, and students with information on their rights in the D.C. public and charter schools, DYRS and the D.C. Department of Corrections; identify appropriate school placements and services; facilitate evaluation referrals; and represent families at suspension hearings and special education administrative hearings. participate and advocate in school meetings, IEP meetings, and collaborate with professionals working with youth in the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

¹ NATIONAL JUVENILE JUSTICE NETWORK, *SNAPSHOT: IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM* (2016).

² STUDENTS IN THE CARE OF DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

³ *Id.*

⁴ Roslin Growe & Paula S. Montgomery, *Educational equity in America: Is Education the Great Equalizer*, *THE PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR* 25(2), 1 (2003).

IMPACT

- 71: In its first year of operation, Lawyers for the People, provided legal services to 71 D.C. youth and their families who had matters before D.C. Superior Court;
- 63 of the 71 youths had matters in either Delinquency or PINS court, while 8 of the youth served had matters before the Abuse and Neglect Court;
- 34 of the 71 students received special education representation from Lawyers for the People attorneys;
- 10 students qualified and received initial IEP's through the direct efforts of Lawyers for the People;
- 9 students received funding for non-public day schools through the direct efforts of Lawyers for the People. The tuition for non-public day schools is approximately \$60,000 per year;
- 4 students qualified and received 504 plan's through the direct efforts of Lawyers for the People;
- 3 Due Process Complaints were filed against DCPS, which resulted in hundreds of hours of compensatory education in the form of tutors and mentors. One student received funding for a non-public school through the filed due process complaint;
- 3 students had expulsions overturned and were allowed to return to their respective schools through the direct efforts of Lawyers for the People;
- 2 students received funding for Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities through the direct efforts of Lawyers for the People;
- Executive Director, Coury Mascagni, was a lead presenter at the Neglect & Delinquency Practice Institute held at the D.C. Bar on September 23-24, 2019.

FINANCIALS

(Year 1: June 1, 2018 – June 1, 2019)

	Year 1 (Actual)
Funding (Donations)	\$645
Direct Cost	0
Funding (Attorney Fees Earned)	\$59,994
Total Direct Cost	\$0
Gross Surplus	\$60,639
Gross Surplus %	100.00%
Expenses	
Payroll	\$50,220
Sales and Marketing and Other Expenses	\$600
Depreciation	\$0
Web site + DSL	\$500
Utilities	\$0
Insurance	\$2,000
Rent	\$0
Payroll Fees and Taxes	\$1,800
Other	\$5,519
Total Operating Expenses	\$10,419
Surplus Before Interest and Taxes	\$0
Interest Expense	
Taxes Incurred	
Net Surplus	\$0
Net Surplus/Funding	0.00%

WHAT'S AHEAD

Staff

Moving forward, Lawyers for the People (L4P) is increasing capacity. To date, L4P has already contracted with a paralegal and a child psychologist to work with select youth. L4P hopes to hire at least two more attorneys that will continue to provide wrap around legal representation to D.C. youth and their families. L4P also is working to contract with tutors and mentors during the next fiscal year. Finally, L4P is working with Equal Justice Works grant applicants and is in the process of hiring law school student interns and fellows.

Office Space

L4P currently uses remote offices and home visits to conduct its business. However, L4P is in the process of acquiring office space. New office space will allow L4P to continue to grow, and ultimately hire an office manager who is a DC Public Schools or DC Public Charter school graduate.

Continued Representation of Court involved D.C. Residents

L4P currently works exclusively with D.C. youth and their families. However, one L4P attorney hopes to be appointed to a mental health panel through D.C. Superior Court. Once appointed, L4P will expand its representation to include D.C. residents with mental health challenges.

Keep Building and Improving

L4P believes if you are not moving forward then you are moving backward. In the next year, L4P will update and enhance its website and marketing materials. L4P will increase the number of clients served. L4P will continue to train both advocates and families in the area. L4P will continue to work with various law schools, non-profit and government organizations to provide wrap around support.