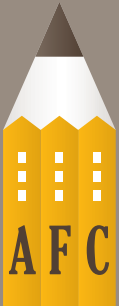


The Advocate

Winter 2020



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

151 West 30th Street, 5th Floor
New York, NY 10001

www.advocatesforchildren.org

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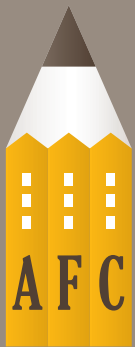
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OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Advocates for Children of New York's mission is to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds. AFC achieves this through four integrated strategies: free advice and legal representation for families of students; free trainings and workshops for parents and professionals, to equip them to advocate on behalf of students; policy advocacy to effect change in the education system and improve education outcomes; and impact litigation to protect the right to quality education and to compel needed education reform.

Spotlight on Success: Mia's Story

When we last shared Mia's story, she was struggling in a school that was unable to accommodate her. We're thrilled to report that Mia is currently making tremendous progress, thanks to a school placement that meets her unique needs!

Mia, who has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair, was previously attending a District 75 school that the NYC Department of Education (DOE) had identified as accessible. Mia was placed in a classroom on the first floor that was able to accommodate her mobility needs, but it turned out to be the only classroom in the school that was able to accommodate her. As a result, Mia remained in that classroom for five years, making minimal progress as she continued to receive the same educational content with each group of incoming students, while her peers progressed through the curriculum and moved on to other classrooms.

After Mia's mother repeatedly raised concerns, AFC intervened to secure a re-evaluation for Mia, which confirmed that her academic and social progress had plateaued during the five years she had remained in the first-floor classroom. AFC fought alongside Mia and her mother to find a new placement, a battle that made headlines; Mia was featured on the cover of the New York Daily News, becoming the face of the thousands of New York City students who lack appropriate accommodations in school.

AFC was able to secure placement for Mia at a specialized non-public school, where she started in the summer of

2019. As Mia's mother Yuvi describes it, the new placement is a completely new world. "Here, they are not punishing her behavior. They are working to understand it, and her."

Mia's story is a stark reminder of the difference an appropriate placement can make not only for the student, but for the family. "I had fought for vision services for Mia for a really long time," Yuvi recalls, "and the second I got into Manhattan Star, they saw that she needed vision stuff. Things that normally I would feel I have to fight for, they're just doing."

Mia, who had never used a keyboard at her old school, is now becoming familiar with navigating technology thanks to an adaptive keyboard her teachers provided. "You shouldn't have to go through all this trouble just to get the basic stuff that you'd want your kid to get," Yuvi says. "Had it not been for AFC, I know she'd just have been on that first floor until she graduated."

"Mia's IEP meeting is coming up, and for the first time I don't feel like I have to put on boxing gloves and bring an advocate with me. It shouldn't be like that. The story turned out differently for me, but for a lot of kids that doesn't happen. A lot of kids don't know that advocates are out there really helping people."

"Mia has displayed huge improvements and is learning how to manage her emotions and use her words — she is advocating for herself."

-Yuvi, Mia's mother



Mia at her new school riding a bike, in music class, and using an adaptive keyboard for the very first time



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Advocates for Children
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151 West 30th Street, 5th Floor
New York, NY 10001

info@advocatesforchildren.org
www.advocatesforchildren.org

Phone • 212-947-9779
Fax • 212-947-9790

AFC's Jill Chaifetz
Education Helpline

(866) 427-6033
Monday–Thursday
10am–4pm

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Data Report: 1 in 10 New York City students experienced homelessness last year

**For the fourth
year in a row,
more than
114,000
New York City
students
experienced
homelessness**

New York City has a homelessness crisis, and it's affecting students and their families. Over the last decade, the number of students who experienced homelessness has increased by more than 70%, and data released by AFC this Fall confirms that the trend shows no signs of stopping.

The number of New York City students who experienced homelessness last year—85% of whom are Black or Hispanic—could fill the Barclays Center six times. While this crisis is spread throughout the city, it is most acute in the Bronx and parts of Brooklyn, where more than 20% of the student population experiences homelessness in certain districts.

For these 114,000 students, access to a stable education can make all the difference. But attending school while navigating housing instability isn't easy, and we've seen that the educational outcomes for students experiencing homelessness are significantly worse than their permanently housed peers.

Fewer than a third of New York City students who are homeless are reading proficiently, rates that are 20 percentage points lower than students who are permanently housed. Only 57 percent of all students who are homeless graduate from high school. And, for students living in shelters, the disparities are even more stark—fewer than half graduate from high school.

Until we address the dismal educational outcomes for students who are homeless, we won't be able to break the cycle of homelessness. National research from Chapin Hall's Voice of Youth Count has shown that the lack of a high school diploma is the single greatest risk factor for homelessness among young adults, putting youth without a diploma at 4.5 times the risk of experiencing homelessness as adults compared to their peers who completed high school.

Over the past few years, the City has taken some positive steps to support students who are homeless, including appointing new leaders to support this population, placing 100 "Bridging the Gap" social workers and more than 100 community coordinators in schools with high numbers of students who are homeless, offering yellow bus service to kindergarten through sixth grade students living in shelter, increasing pre-K enrollment among children living in shelter, and providing after-school reading programs at certain shelters.

But there is still much hard work to be done. Now that the City has established new leadership and hired school staff to support these students, it is time to start turning around educational outcomes for students who are homeless.

Want to learn more?
Check out *The New York Times'* coverage of this data, a day in the life of two elementary students experiencing homelessness.

AFC runs the **New York State Technical Education and Assistance Center for Homeless Students (NYS-TEACHS)**. NYS-TEACHS provides information, referrals, and training to schools, school districts, social service providers, parents, and others about the educational rights of children and youth experiencing homelessness in New York State. For information and support, call their Infoline at (800) 388-2014, or visit the project's website, nysteachs.org.

Going Back to Court: L.V. v DOE

In New York City, if you have a child with a disability and you do not believe they received an appropriate education, you have the right to request an **impartial hearing**. If the hearing officer agrees with you, the hearing officer may order different types of relief, including compensatory services, related services, evaluations, or a change in school placement. The DOE is then required to follow the order.

In 2007, we settled a class action lawsuit with the DOE, addressing the DOE's failure to comply in a timely manner with hearing orders that require them to provide or pay for programs and services for students with disabilities. The settlement required that the DOE meet certain benchmarks, such as reaching a 75% rate of implementation and eventually more than 90% implementation.

Unfortunately, the DOE is now implementing orders in a timely manner at rates lower than 50%. As a result, AFC returned to court this fall with its pro bono co-counsel Milbank Tweed, to ask that a special master be appointed to oversee and make recommendations to improve the DOE's system of implementing orders.

If you or someone you know has experienced similar delays in the implementation of impartial hearing orders, please reach out to Advocates for Children of New York by calling our Helpline: (866) 427-6033, Monday to Thursday from 10 am – 4 pm.



Updated Publications: Early Childhood Education

We've updated many of our Early Childhood Education guides and resources, including guides designed to help families of children born in 2015 navigate the Kindergarten admissions and Turning 5 processes.

- **Early Intervention Guide** (available in English and Spanish)
For children from birth to age three with developmental delays and disabilities.
- **Preschool Special Education Guide** (available in English, Spanish, Bengali, and Chinese)
- **Turning 5 Guide** (available in English, Spanish, Arabic, Bengali, and Chinese)
A guide to the transition from preschool special education to kindergarten.
- **Kindergarten Admissions Guide** (available in English, Spanish, Arabic, Bengali, and Chinese)
For families of children born in 2015.

Partnership Spotlight: Raising New York

AFC is proud to be part of **Raising NY**, a statewide coalition of organizations dedicated to improving programs, services, and policies for children pre-natal to 3.

We know that investing in high-quality early childhood programs leads to success later in life, makes communities safer, and stops the school-to-prison pipeline. And yet, across New York State, hundreds of thousands of families are prevented from accessing the high-quality programs, services, and opportunities they need to raise healthy and thriving children.

Raising NY aims to change that with four focused priorities: 1) Improve access to health and developmental care; 2) Ensure access to high-quality affordable child care; 3) Help more families become financially secure; and 4) Build a system that works together for families, allowing providers to share information and coordinate services, monitoring developmental milestones, and supporting children with special needs as they transition into preschool.

Learn more at RaisingNY.org and sign-up to receive updates from the coalition!

