

# **LEGAL ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH**

*Law Foundation of Silicon Valley*

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## **Mission Statement**

Legal Advocates for Children and Youth(LACY) advances the rights of children and youth, empowering them to lead healthy and productive lives. We listen to, advise, and advocate for our clients to ensure their voices are heard and their rights are protected.

## **Structure**

LACY is one of five programs under the administration of the Law Foundation of Silicon Valley. LACY has provided free and confidential legal services to Santa Clara County youth for nearly 20 years in a variety of practice areas. When taking on the contract to represent minors in juvenile dependency, LACY adopted an expanded management structure to accommodate organizational growth. All LACY operations are overseen by a Directing Attorney. The remainder of the LACY management team includes two supervising attorneys and a supervising social worker. One supervising attorney oversees all of LACY's work outside the juvenile dependency area. This work includes special education, probate guardianship, and family law. Another supervising attorney is devoted to management of the juvenile dependency unit. This unit includes 13 attorneys and 3 support staff. LACY also employs seven social workers, most of who are devoted to the dependency unit. The supervising social worker oversees each of these employees.

## **Representation philosophy**

LACY's philosophy of child advocacy is informed by long-standing legal principles and adherence to established principles of child and youth development. The Welfare and Institutions Code requires LACY to advocate for the best interests of dependent minors. At the same time, the Code requires that the court receive information as to the minor's stated interests. This presents unique challenges and difficult decisions for minor's counsel in many instances.

LACY attorneys and social workers recognize the importance of building rapport with our child clients. When first meeting with a client, LACY staff spend time getting to know their clients in an effort to build trust and create a path for constructive communication. Individual clients and their families are assessed to determine their strengths and whether support systems can be implemented to maintain that family unit. If such services cannot be identified, LACY staff will advocate that their clients have permanent, nurturing homes through relatives or foster care.

LACY believes in encouraging children to play an active role in the many aspects of their court cases and service development. When a child leaves the system through family reunification, legal permanency, or emancipation, LACY wants that child to feel like their voice was heard. LACY also believes in emphasizing the importance of the attorney-client relationship through frequent contact with the children we serve.