

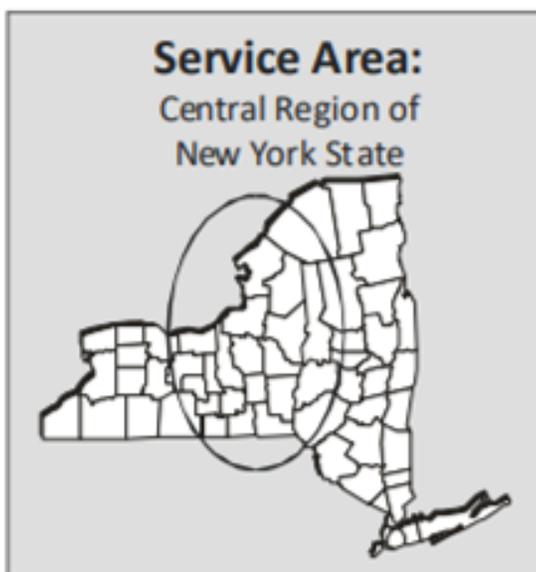
**VOLUNTEER  
LAWERS  
PROJECT  
OF CNY**  
2022-2023

# OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

In the 2022-23 year, Volunteer Lawyers Project of CNY, Inc. (VLP) conducted 5,319 intakes, closed 3,243 individual cases, benefiting 7,884 people in civil legal issues affecting the essentials of life, including housing, family, elder and divorce law, and provided legal assistance in 82 group cases, supporting low-income entrepreneurs and nonprofits serving low-income individuals. VLP provided referrals to other legal and social services to 2,825 individuals. Overall, VLP’s panel of over 700 pro bono volunteers provided over 4,800 hours of service.

Tenants’ rights continue to be a major focus. With the eviction moratorium ended, and many clients still unable to pay their rents due to the linger effects of covid and exorbitant rent increases, VLP staff and volunteers were busy daily in Landlord Tenant court. Our Eviction Defense program closed 1,170 cases, benefiting 3,045 individuals. We prevented eviction for 44% of households, delayed eviction for 45% of households, and reduced the amount owed by tenants by \$2,376,289. Fifty-five volunteers donated 534 hours to assist with representing these clients.

This year, our team coordinated a series of trainings and clinics to provide a rapid response to serve new arrivals fleeing war in Afghanistan and Ukraine. VLP partnered with Hiscock Legal Aid, Catholic Charities, Interfaith Works and RISE, and dozens of pro bono attorneys to provide legal advice and counsel to over 170 families. Pro bono attorneys are now preparing and submitting asylum, TPS and other applications to help these families obtain permanent stability here in CNY. We closed 407 immigration cases in the past year in CNY and the North Country. We also began partnering with volunteer lawyer programs across Upstate New York to coordinate efforts and expand our combined capacities to serve immigrants.



**Population Served:** General Low Income Population

**Total Funding:** \$2,598,780

**Total IOLA Grant:** \$100,000

**Staffing Full Time Equivalents:**

- Total Staff: 24
- Paralegals: 8.2
- Lawyers: 11.8
- Other: 4

VLP's LGBT Rights program continued working closely with community partners across the state to provide transgender name change clinics and address anti-LGBTQ discrimination in housing, employment, healthcare and public accommodations. The program closed 265 cases, including 160 transgender name changes, and saved clients over \$18,000 in filing fees. Law students from Cornell Law School and Syracuse University College of Law volunteered over 700 hours serving these clients.

VLP's Family Court Clinic and Divorce Program, which assists unrepresented litigants closed 641 cases. The Surrogate's Court Clinic was able to move from fully remote to a hybrid model. Overall, the Surrogate's Court, Hospital Clinic, and Wills programs served 206 people. Our community-based Talk to a Lawyer clinics served 336 people before the year end.

VLP's Debt Defense program closed 79 cases and saved debtors \$346,419. In one case, a woman received an income garnishment notice for medical debt incurred at a hospital years ago. VLP helped her file a motion to vacate the old judgment, both because she was never properly served with the summons, and because the hospital should have offered her Charity Care (a kind of financial assistance) to help pay for her treatment. We were able to get her entire debt erased. In 2023 VLP began to expand its focus on medical and nursing home debt, to fight unjust collection practices and empower healthcare consumers by strengthening efforts to end medical debt in CNY. VLP's low-income small business and nonprofit program served 82 clients, closing 65 cases, including incorporating 12 groups.

VLP provided community legal trainings to over 375 individuals and VLP brochures, palm cards and materials were circulated to an additional 4,000 people.

---

## DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES: CASES

---

### *Housing*

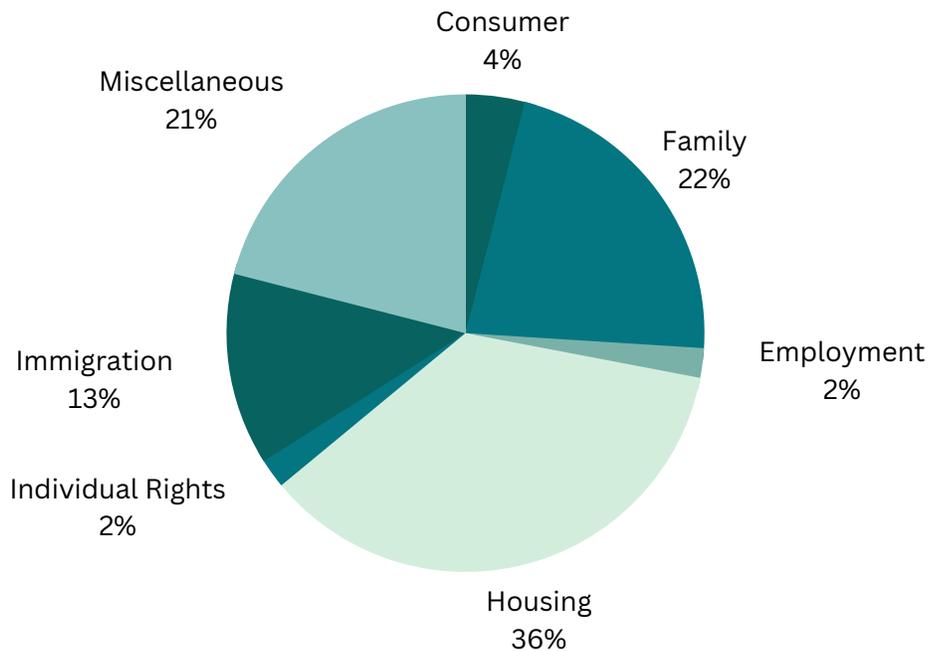
The story of S.G., a young single father who had severe financial hardship during the pandemic. He lost hours at his job due to Covid but also when he had to care for his son who was quarantined twice from school. His grandfather died from Covid, and the family had to absorb his health and funeral expenses. All of this made it really difficult for him to keep up with the rent. We first met S.G. back in March of 2022, when his landlord was so frustrated at his inability to pay the rent that he had filed a Holdover, or "no cause" eviction case. He was telling S.G. and the court that he didn't want any rent, he was "only" interested in getting the place back. The landlord repeatedly refused S.G.'s

attempts to pay the rent so he and his young son could remain housed. We were able to help S.G learn about the NY State Emergency Rental Assistance Program. He applied, and we were able to get him multiple court adjournments while the application was pending. In the meantime, we helped him re-establish the relationship with his landlord and helped convince the landlord to start accepting rent payments again. Eventually, after 5 months of negotiations, made possible due to the ERAP court delays, the landlord agreed to accept S.G.'s payments and told the court he was no longer interested in pursuing eviction. The case was withdrawn and S.G. and his son were able to stay in their apartment.

**7,884**  
people  
benefitted from  
**3,243**  
legal cases  
closed

**Immigration**

In this past year VLP has received asylum approvals for a mother and son from the Democratic Republic of Congo who were being threatened by the same armed militants who had murdered their husband/father before they came to the United States. They will now be able to live safely in the United States, and we are working to help bring the rest of their family here as well.



**Cases by Legal Problem Area**

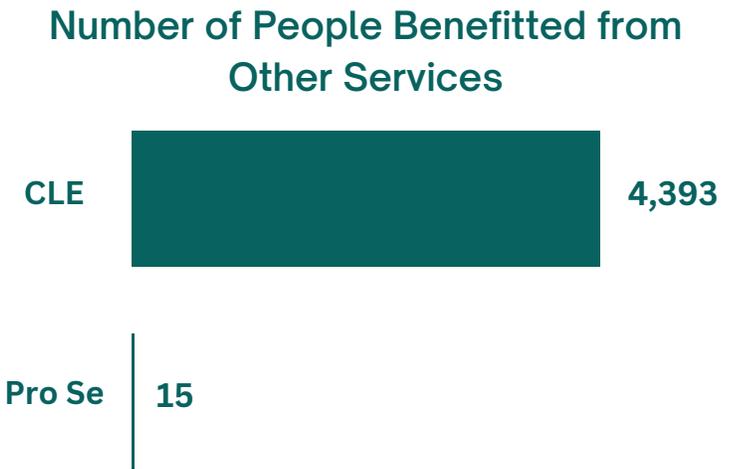
# OTHER SERVICES: OVERVIEW

For VLP, community legal education is a critical component in the continuum of legal services, helping the community understand their legal rights and how to access legal services, including VLP services, that can help them navigate the legal system. VLP’s target population is people who cannot afford legal assistance or who cannot find legal assistance. We also target education for case managers, medical providers, and other direct service providers who work regularly with these populations.

The majority of VLP’s Community Legal Education efforts are focused in Central New York, though VLP has programs that cover 19 counties. VLP provides legal education in association with different community-based organizations, including shelters, schools, churches, and tenants’ rights groups. These training courses cover the range of legal services that VLP provides, including housing, family law, immigration, elder and consumer law. VLP does more targeted community legal education for immigrant communities and the LGBT community.

In total, VLP provided in-person community legal education sessions to 376 individuals, plus another 208 through online presentations. Further, combined with other community legal education outreach, such as distribution of legal education brochures and flyers, VLP to over shared legal education materials and content with over 4,300 individuals. We reported 2,227 other, which includes email updates distributed and handouts distributed regarding VLPCNY’s services.

**4,408**  
people  
benefitted from  
Services Other  
Than Direct  
Legal Services



## OTHER SERVICES: TECHNOLOGY

---

VLP continued to fine-tune the technology upgrades that we completed last fiscal year, including building in a system for syncing ongoing updates regarding case status from LegalServer to Microsoft Sharepoint.

We have begun using unique Sharepoint Sites with special permissions to facilitate collaboration with outside organizations on shared projects. For example, our Immigration Program now shares an Immigration Legal Sharepoint site with the Immigration Team for Hiscock Legal Aid, where we are able to share resources, forms, and grant reporting documents. We are also able to track client status for the high-volume Afghan response clinics and high-volume consultation days in this folder (all clients sign a release to allow both agencies access to their files). We have set up similar sites with each of our partner refugee resettlement agencies, which they are using to transmit client intake forms and supporting documents, significantly streamlining our intake process.

## OTHER SERVICES: TRAININGS

---

Staff are encouraged to engage in professional development, and a professional development plan is part of regular supervision. Staff can attend OCBA CLE training courses for free and are encouraged to seek out additional training opportunities throughout the state or via webinars that pertain to their areas of practice. VLP pays for all training. VLP also supports leadership development opportunities for staff and encourages staff to participate in leadership development programs during work hours. All members of staff are encouraged to engage in training courses with their professional associations, regardless of whether they are attorneys or in administration. VLP provides guidance to staff during regular staff meetings. These training courses include topics such as gender identity and pro ethics.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) continues to be a major focus of professional development for staff and volunteers. In the past year, VLP staff participated in a 4-part training series on combating white supremacy in legal services with Just Root Consulting. The Board of Directors (the Board) updated its Strategic Plan with DEI outcomes, including creating an Equity Committee of the Board. The Board also amended VLP By-Laws to Create and Equity and Justice Committee, as well as the adoption of an Equity and Anti-Oppression Statement. VLP continues to have Access to Justice fellowships.

VLP also provides CLE training courses throughout the year to volunteers, and makes those training sessions available to staff, board, and volunteers. We continue to include DEI components in all substantive law training sessions that we provide.

## PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

VLP has a roster of over 700 volunteers. VLP's pro bono panel provided 4,847 hours of pro bono service this year. Volunteers lawyers served in all VLP programs and represented clients in 30% of the cases that VLP closed. VLP actively engages law students as well, who assist with intake, drafting client documents, research and even practice under student practice orders. This year we held 11 CLE training sessions that were attended by 245 volunteers. We use these training sessions to keep people up with the law and to recruit new volunteers.



**141 Attorneys volunteered 2,683 hours**

**47 Law Students volunteered 1,864 hours**

**1 Other Volunteer volunteered 300 hours**

Each  icon is equal to 18.9 volunteers.

Attorneys are represented through the Green Figure.

Law Students and Other Volunteers are represented through the Grey Figure.

In the past few months VLP has developed and implements a pro bono best practices working group comprised of VLP staff. The purpose of this working group is to review current agency practices in recruiting, training, and retaining pro bono volunteers and based upon findings, implement process improvements to optimize pro bono and client experiences. VLP is exploring standardization or improvement of intake processes and undertake a review of technology used to support pro bono volunteers to develop new practices and technologies that may increase volunteer numbers. We plan to better utilize the VLP website to advertise volunteer opportunities, as well as allow volunteers to express interest in cases/clinics through the VLP website. We plan to continue to provide CLEs to introduce/reintroduce the VLP mission, our pro bono volunteer opportunities, and the benefits to volunteering and best practices in trauma-informed legal service.

In the past year, VLP continued to coordinate trainings and clinics to serve new arrivals fleeing war in Afghanistan and Ukraine. VLP partnered with Hiscock Legal Aid, Catholic Charities, Interfaith Works and RISE, and dozens of pro bono attorneys to provide legal advice and counsel to over 170 families. Pro bono attorneys are now preparing and submitting asylum, TPS and other applications to help these families obtain permanent stability here in CNY. In 2023 we are partnering with other volunteer lawyer programs across Upstate New York to expand our impact.

---

## **SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS**

---

VLP continues the collaboration with the Onondaga County Bar Association (OCBA). OCBA helps VLP to promote pro bono opportunities and recruit volunteers from OCBA's membership. OCBA sends e-blasts with VLP updates to its entire membership. OCBA co-sponsors CLEs that VLP provides for free to train volunteer attorneys in exchange for their pro bono time commitment. VLP refers clients who are not financially eligible for VLP's services to OCBA's Lawyer Referral Service, and OCBA's Lawyer Referral Service sends clients who cannot afford an attorney to VLP's services.

VLP continues to collaborate with several other bar associations, including the Central New York Women's Bar Association, the Jefferson, Oswego and Cayuga County Bar Associations, the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) Upstate New York Chapter, the William Herbert Johnson Bar Association, VLP's local minority bar association, and New York State Bar Association.

VLP collaborates with many community organizations and agencies that have housed VLP's clinics, all of which work to promote VLP programs to their clients and members. These organizations include Onondaga County Libraries, Seymour Library in Auburn, Westcott Community Center, the Syracuse Vet Center, Fort Drum Army Base, the Rescue Mission, many of Catholic Charities' programs, Interfaith Works, the Vera House, Oswego County Opportunities, Upstate Hospital, the Samaritan Center, Syracuse City School District, SUNY EOC, Planned Parenthood, ACR Health's Q Center (LGBT Youth Center), the Gender Wellness Center in Oneonta and many more. In addition to these partners, VLP collaborates with organizations to provide community legal education, including the Housing and Homeless Coalition of CNY, which is made up of over 30 organizations, the CNY Human Services Leadership Coalition, consisting of 70 organizations, Antitrafficking Coalitions in the North Country, Migrant Farmworker Coalitions, the Syracuse Tenants Network, the Workers' Center of Central New York, Jubilee Homes and more.

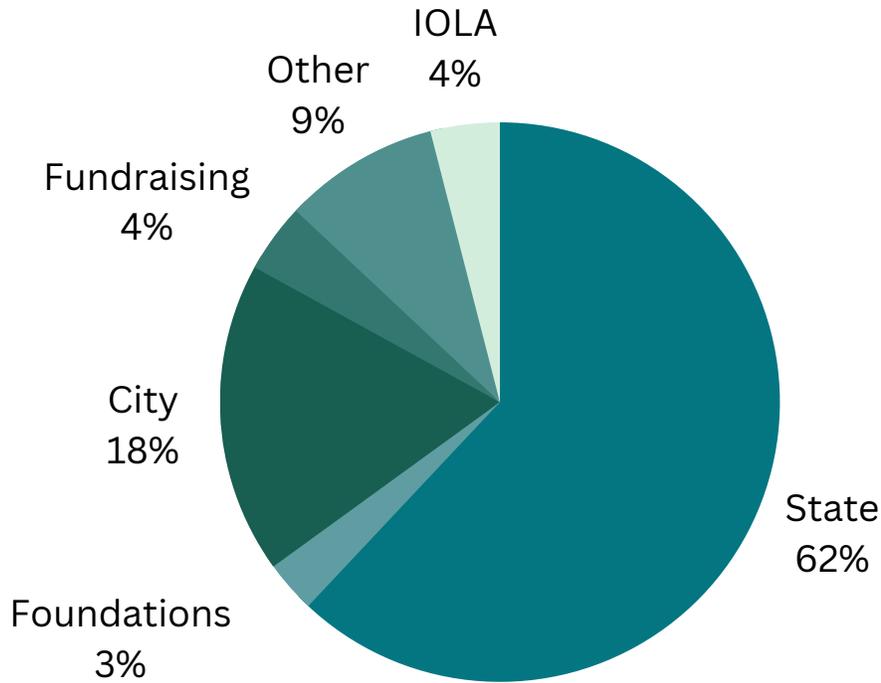
VLP's most significant collaboration with a legal services provider is with Hiscock Legal Aid Society (HLA). VLP and HLA share one immigration program and work together on all aspects of service. VLP and HLA together attempt to achieve representation of 100% of clients who appear in landlord-tenant court in Syracuse City Court. VLP's divorce program only takes clients that are conflicted out of HLA. VLP also works with Legal Services of Central New York (LSCNY), Legal Aid Society of Mid New York (LASMNY), Center for Community Alternatives, Syracuse University College of Law Clinical Program, Cornell University Law School Clinical Program, and CNY Fair Housing.

Finally, VLP is actively engaged in the New York Legal Services Coalition, a group with nearly 50 legal aid groups that collaborates to advocate for the provision of high quality legal services across New York State.

---

# SOURCES OF FUNDING

Volunteer Lawyers Project of CNY  
 received **\$2,598,780**  
 in total funding this past year



Foundations	\$81,125
IOLA Grant	\$100,000
City and County Funding	\$456,927
Fundraising	\$91,230
State Funding	\$1,611,781
Other	\$257,717
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,598,780</b>