

# **PART OF THE SOLUTION**

2022-2023

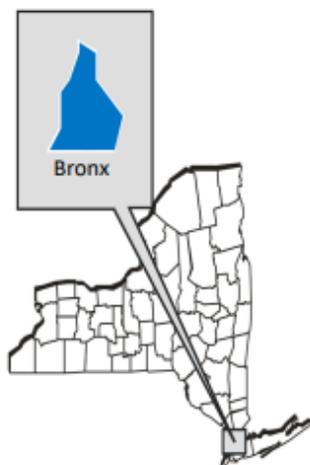
# OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

We at POTS serve low-income residents of the Bronx, a community hard hit by poverty and COVID-19. During the grant year, POTS provided legal services to 557 households, consisting of 1559 individuals, and obtained \$3,675,127.59 in back awards and settlements for our clients. POTS also saved clients \$92,480.41 in awards and settlements avoided.

**Housing:** POTS’ legal team focuses on helping Bronx residents at risk of losing their homes and prevented a total of 271 evictions in the grant year, including 223 evictions from private housing, 43 from subsidized housing, and 5 from public housing.

Highlights of our other housing-related legal outcomes include:

- Obtained more than \$2.4 million in contributions to pay rent arrears, including \$1,648,212 in NYS ERAP funds, \$465,059 in funds from private charities, and \$267,894 in FHEPS funds;
- Obtained back awards and settlements for housing benefits valued at \$1619.68 and an additional \$5685.74 in monthly housing benefits;
- Helped housing clients avoid \$92,480 in judgments or settlements;
- Helped seniors and disabled persons save \$928.39 in monthly rental payments;
- Delayed eviction and obtained additional time to find alternative housing for 5 households; and
- Obtained housing, improved housing conditions or otherwise enforced rights to decent habitable housing for 5 households.



**Population Served:** General Low Income Population

**Total Funding:** \$1,040,445

**Total IOLA Grant:** \$50,000

**Staffing Full Time Equivalents:**

- Total Staff: 7.1
- Paralegals: 4
- Lawyers: 4
- Other: 0.1

POTS achieved the following **income maintenance** outcomes:

- Obtained, preserved, or increased public assistance, TANF, or other welfare benefit/right for 23 households, consisting of 69 individuals;
- Overcame the denial of emergency assistance for 33 households, consisting of 93 individuals;
- Obtained, preserved, or increased food stamps eligibility for 6 households, consisting of 19 individuals; and
- Obtained back awards and settlements for federal benefits (other than social security, SSI and SSDI) valued at \$1,271,615.25 and an additional \$10,407.40 in monthly federal benefits.

**Increased Access to Justice / Improvements in the Administration of Justice:** We held four Know-Your-Rights presentations in collaboration with other CBOs, at which 116 community members attended. We also posted KYR videos on YouTube, in both English and Spanish, which reached more than 140 additional viewers. Topics covered include Housing Court updates, ERAP, tenant protections, and rights and resources available to the community.

**Improvements in Capacity to Deliver Services:** Effective 1/1/2023, we obtained a significant increase in private funds available to help pay rent arrears. These private funds are used to issue commitment letters and encourage other funders to contribute to pay rent arrears. This increase will enable POTS to help prevent more evictions annually.

We continue to upgrade our technology. Within the grant period, POTS hired an IT consultant firm to connect program services with grants and other fiscal information. This will allow the legal team to track the availability of private grant money to pay rent arrears more easily. Until this upgrade, POTS had relied on spreadsheets to track the funds, which has been time-consuming and inefficient.

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# DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES: CASES

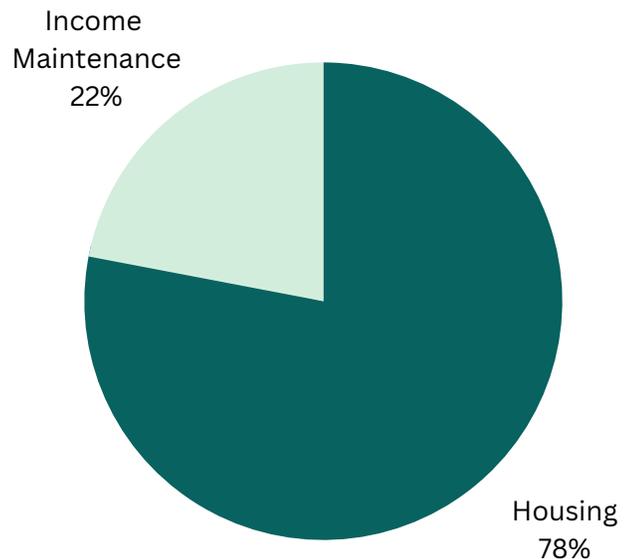
## Housing Case #1

Client PR had an eviction proceeding pending since 2020 when she came to POTS for assistance in July 2022. She and her minor child had unsuccessfully sought help from two other agencies and were now at imminent risk of eviction. POTS’ legal clinic did its intake two days after she first contacted POTS. A POTS attorney appeared in court the afternoon of the intake and successfully got an adjournment to help PR get Family Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement (FHEPS). POTS successfully advocated for PR’s application for FHEPS, which paid her \$20,000 rent arrears in full. The eviction proceeding was then discontinued in November 2022. In addition, POTS also assisted PR to get an ongoing rent supplement from FHEPS and obtain needed repairs to the apartment. PR and her daughter now have stable housing in better repair and with affordable rent.

## Housing Case #2

Client AS was referred to POTS in June 2022 for help with her pending nonpayment case. She had an affordable rent of \$852.81/month and could pay future rent, but had fallen behind due to various health conditions and a car accident. When we accepted the referral, the tenant owed \$9259.68. Her income totaled \$2900/month from a combination of Social Security, pension and veteran’s benefits she received as a widow of a former service member. With the help of private funds awarded to POTS for this purpose, POTS offered a commitment for a grant for \$957.75 and approached other CBOs for contributions, which together provided grants totaling an additional \$4781.84. HRA approved the tenant for an emergency grant of \$2658.51, the remaining balance after the above payments and contributions. AS paid July – September rent in full on her own. By assembling this package of funds and providing legal representation, POTS helped this client avoid eviction and retain her affordable housing.

**1,559**  
people  
benefitted from  
**557**  
legal cases closed



**Cases by  
Legal Problem  
Area**

# OTHER SERVICES: OVERVIEW

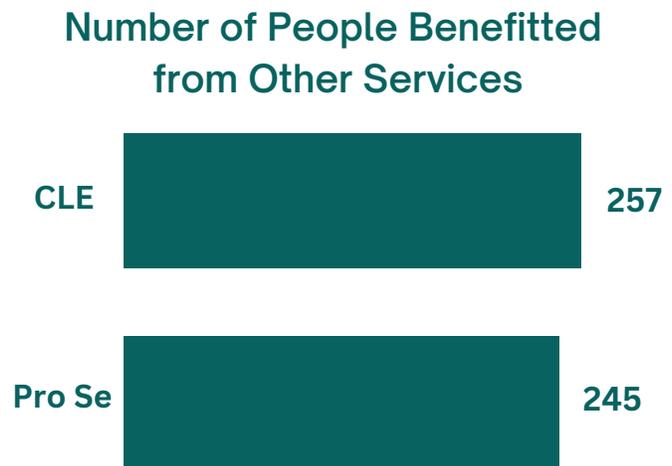
**Community Legal Education:** POTS’ legal team educates the community regarding tenants’ rights and other housing-related matters. These community education events are held in collaboration with other organizations in order to broaden their reach. An example is the July 2022 event held in collaboration with a committee of the Bronx Bar Association and the Kingsbridge Heights Community Center. The event was held in both English and Spanish.

**Pro Se Assistance:** POTS is unable to provide full legal representation to meet the demand. If the individual is unable to connect with another provider, POTS provides advice on how to proceed pro se. For example, during the grant year, POTS’ legal team helped tenants complete ERAP applications on a pro se basis, when POTS was unable to provide full representation. Also, the legal team helped clients complete forms to file HP cases against their landlords on a pro se basis to get their housing violations fixed, when housing repairs was not part of the case for which POTS is providing direct representation.

Similarly POTS also provides advice to clients who proceed on a pro se basis in administrative hearings to protect their access to public benefits, frequently helping them apply for hearings without agreeing to be the client’s representative at the hearing.

Further this pro se advice clears up significant confusion clients are experiencing. For example, many clients think predicate notices are eviction notices and they think they have to vacate units, not understanding that many more steps are involved and they have more time to try to resolve issues like rent arrears.

**502**  
people benefitted  
from Services  
Other Than Direct  
Legal Services



## OTHER SERVICES: TECHNOLOGY

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We have continued to work with a consultant to upgrade our customized Salesforce database and make data recording and reporting easier and more useful for internal monitoring, program evaluation, and external reporting. POTS will be rolling out planned improvements in the coming contract year, utilizing Salesforce to increase productivity by streamlining the intake process and allowing client-facing staff to better serve clients seeking legal services and connecting them to the range of services and benefits that are available at POTS.

POTS' Legal Clinic continues to use Zoom for virtual workshops and community trainings to educate clients on legal assistance resources and to facilitate remote court hearings. POTS has recently completed construction of a classroom space outfitted with technology that will allow it to host hybrid workshops with in-person presentations that can be seamlessly broadcast on Zoom.

Texting via mobile devices has also allowed clients and staff to share documents rapidly. Lastly, POTS allows clients to utilize the technology available at its facility to enhance their access to technology.

## OTHER SERVICES: TRAININGS

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In-house training for new staff is conducted by POTS' Supervising Attorney and its Director of Programs. Collectively, they have over 20 years' experience with housing and public benefits law and with serving low-income Bronx residents. Annually POTS allocates \$600 per employee for external professional development and makes use of extensive free professional development services available to nonprofit staff that include training on skills in supervising, providing feedback, and other skills directly related to the services POTS provides. During the contract period, POTS' attorneys and advocates attended more than 60 trainings including: Housing Assistance for Seniors, Accessing and Retaining Housing Vouchers, Rent Regulated Housing and Tenants' Rights, a five-part series of trainings on Family Homelessness Eviction Prevention Supplement (FHEPS), Immigrant Access to Public Benefits and Housing Programs, Pooled Trusts, Fair Hearings 101, NYC Housing Court 101, SNAP Eligibility Overview, Overview of NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA) Regulations and Working with Trauma Victims.

Typically, all of POTS' legal staff attends the biennial NYS Bar Association Legal Services Partnership Conference in Albany where they participate in training and

network with others. Legal staff also participate in trainings made by the Community Service Society, Legal Aid Society, Legal Services NYC, and the Bronx Housing Court on diversity and inclusion, anti-oppression, and cultural competence. POTS also supports the ongoing legal education of its attorneys by paying for all relevant Continuing Legal Education classes in the areas in which POTS practices.

POTS' bi-weekly staff meetings, attended by all staff, include professional development exercises that focus on removing perceived barriers and improving the client's experience. POTS retains Paychex for human resources support services and conducts multiple mandatory trainings. These trainings address issues surrounding workplace harassment and diversity and inclusion trainings. POTS' program staff also take part in diversity and civil rights trainings through partner organizations to ensure that clients are being served fairly and justly. All Legal Clinic staff are required to attend these trainings virtually or in-person.

POTS' Board of Directors participates in trainings hosted by the Robin Hood Foundation regarding the responsibilities of board membership.

During the contract period, POTS worked with the Equity Institute at Domus and conducted an all-day training and staff discussion on diversity, equity and inclusion. POTS also established a staff Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committee that meets regularly to assist leadership of the organization to help POTS growth and progress on these issues.

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## PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

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We try to enlist the help of law school students throughout the year to support the legal team's work. During the contract year POTS hosted one law student and two college students. The legal team was able to utilize the information that resulted from the project for memos and other legal resources. One college student helped with intake and client follow-up, particularly providing Spanish language interpretation for staff that is not fluent. The other student assisted with administrative services that help POTS close cases and create electronic archive files.

**1 Law Student volunteered 10 hours**

**2 Other Volunteers volunteered 456 hours**

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# SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

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We at POTS worked with various organizations to ensure that clients had the necessary legal support to resolve their cases. POTS worked with New York Legal Assistance Group to receive guidance on cases that included social security benefits matters, disability hearings, termination cases, and budgeting advocacy. POTS also received client referrals from and provided client referrals to the Urban Justice Center, the Legal Aid Society, Bronx Defenders, Immigrant Justice Corps, Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation, Mobilization for Justice and Bronx Legal Services. These organizations were able to provide POTS clients with specific services above the organization's current capacity, including referrals to receive emergency funding, legal guidance on immigration matters, additional client support for ERAP applications, and connections to HomeBase providers.

POTS' Legal Team also collaborated with Coalition for the Homeless, Community Service Society, The Bridge Fund, Neighborhood Association for Inter-Cultural Affairs, the Gerstner Family Foundation, Catholic Charities, HELP USA and Bronxworks on several nonpayment housing cases. POTS was able to advocate for clients and work with the organizations to obtain approvals of grant requests to eliminate rental arrears.

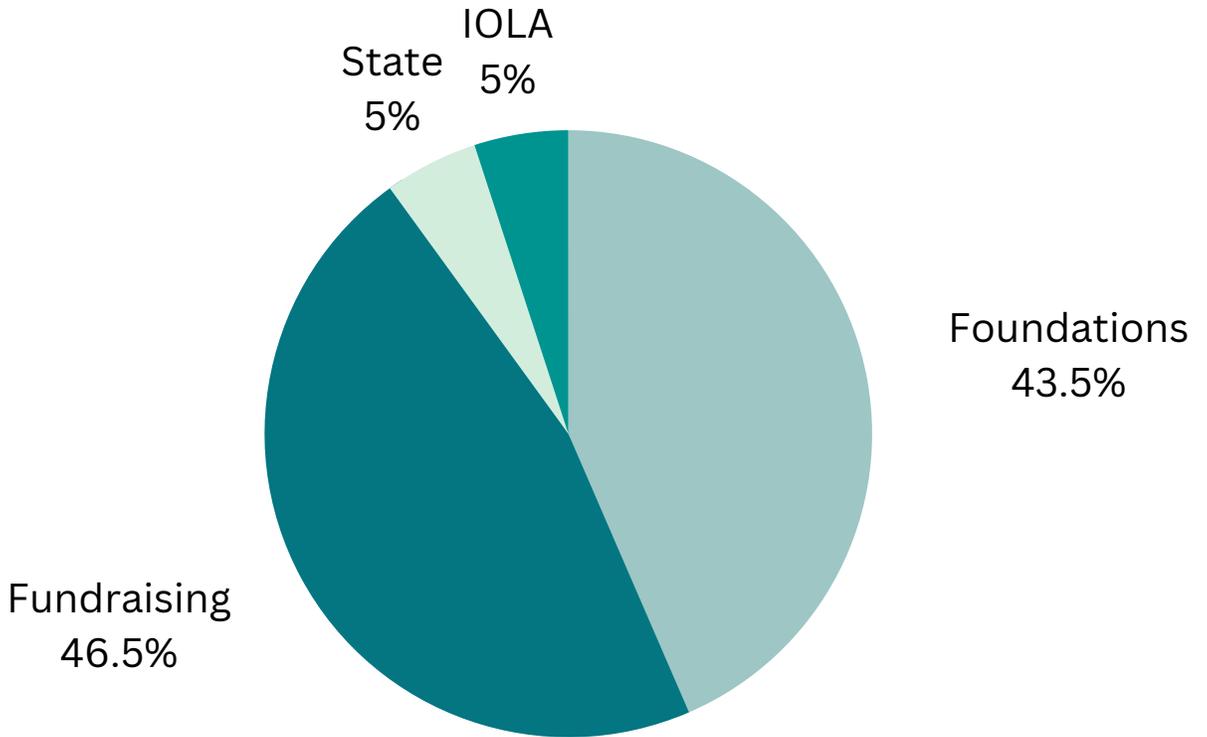
The Legal Team also participates in regular meetings with Bronx Solidarity, a collection of organizations for tenant attorneys and advocates who work together to advocate for improvements in housing court practice. POTS' Supervising Attorney serves on Bronx Solidarity's Steering Committee. The Supervising Attorney and one of POTS' Staff Attorneys attend regular meetings with HRA and Housing and Homelessness Prevention advocates regarding improving HRA operations.

Lastly, POTS' Legal Clinic Supervisor and one of its Legal Advocates are active members of the NYC Emergency Rent Coalition, a collection of community based organizations providing emergency financial assistance to clients, sharing information, and streamlining referrals and coordination between partner organizations. POTS' Legal Team was able to utilize this network as a source of information about law and policy changes, grants, outreach needs, and updates about other legal service providers.

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# SOURCES OF FUNDING

Part of the Solution received  
**\$1,040,445**  
in total funding this past year



Foundations	\$455,000
IOLA Grant	\$50,000
Fundraising	\$484,596
State Funding	\$50,849
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Total	\$1,040,445