

**COMMUNITY
SERVICE
SOCIETY OF
NEW YORK**

2022-2023

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

The Community Service Society of New York (CSS), through its Legal Department and the Department's Next Door Project (NDP), provided direct assistance to over 800 low-income New York City residents this year, typically several different legal services to each client. All clients were members of our target population: low-income New Yorkers with arrest or conviction histories.

Clients usually begin NDP through group intake sessions that begin with a know-your-rights presentation. Near the end of the grant period, we restarted group intakes at our offices – which had been cancelled because of the pandemic – and have them scheduled each month for the remainder of the year. During the grant period, however, we continued to do group intakes at community partners throughout New York City, completing over 30.

For all NDP clients, we request and receive their official criminal histories, both those maintained by New York State and – for clients with out-of-state or federal arrests – the FBI. We then analyze those records to find and correct errors, examine whether the client is able to seal any convictions, and determine the client's eligibility for either a certificate of relief from disabilities ("CRD") or a certificate of good conduct ("CGC"), which remove statutory barriers to employment and provide proof that either a criminal court judge or the parole board, depending on the certificate, has found the client to be rehabilitated. This is useful when the client seeks any type of future opportunity.

All of this information is conveyed in one-on-one counseling sessions, where clients receive customized advice about how their criminal record may affect how they wish to better their lives, such as by obtaining employment, occupational licenses, housing, and higher education.



Population Served: Low Income New Yorkers with Arrest and/or Conviction Histories

Total Funding: \$1,243,026

Total IOLA Grant: \$80,000

Staffing Full Time Equivalent:

- Total Staff: 7
- Paralegals: 3
- Lawyers: 4

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES: CASES

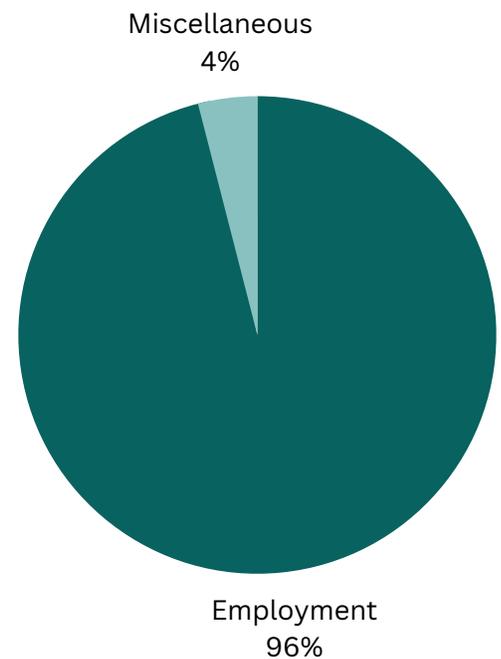
Employment and Administrative Advocacy:

After moving to New York City, a participant at one of our partners – ACE Programs for the Homeless – found himself unable to make ends meet and stuck in the shelter system. He entered Project Comeback for the opportunity at a job and, while attending the program, disclosed that he was once a certified nurse’s assistant (“CNA”) in New Jersey. He confessed that he loved the work but could not afford to transfer his certification to New York.

Fortunately, ACE was able to cover the costs, and the client began to look for work, receiving an offer in a few short weeks. In fields that involve the care of vulnerable populations, however, The Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs checks each prospective employee’s fingerprint-based criminal history. The Justice Center informed the participant that his criminal history was going to disqualify him unless he provided evidence of good conduct within 30 days.

The ACE participant contacted CSS shortly thereafter, and one of our attorneys represented the client throughout the clearance process. First, we obtained an extension to thoughtfully craft the client’s application. From there, we advised the client on the types of certificates and letters to collect and called an out-of-state public defender office to obtain documentation showing that the Justice Center’s background check was wrong: It had classified a conviction as a felony, when it was a misdemeanor. Finally, we interviewed the client and helped him write his personal statement. In the end, he was granted clearance by The Justice Center and began full-time employment shortly thereafter.

1,702 people benefitted from 856 legal cases closed



Cases by Legal Problem Area

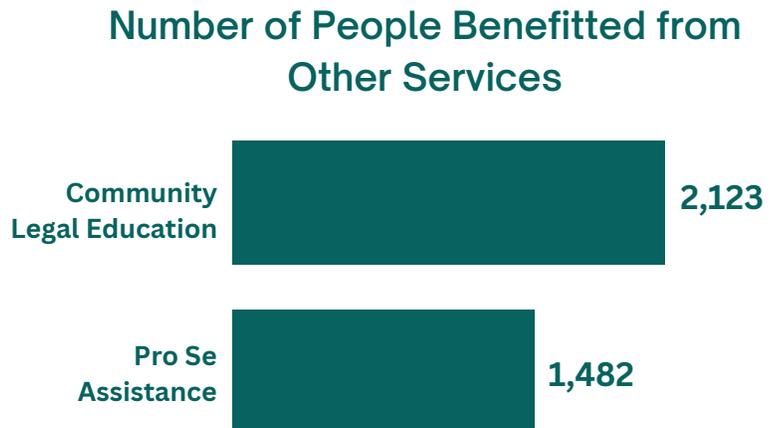
OTHER SERVICES: OVERVIEW

CSS provides a significant amount of community legal education: It is built-in to our regular group intake process, where we get the majority of our clients. Our typical presentation covers the types of criminal records and who can see them; sealing and expungement in New York; certificates of relief from disabilities and certificates of good conduct; and the employment and civil rights of people with criminal records. Questions are encouraged, and we also provide case examples so attendees can understand how the law applies in various situations. Attendees leave with handouts that summarize the information discussed, and the CSS attorney who gives the presentation is also available to provide individual counsel afterward.

These presentations occur monthly at CSS’s office, but the majority of them are provided in the community, where CSS integrates its capabilities with its partner reentry service providers to serve their clients with criminal records. CSS provided community legal education to over 600 people during the grant period.

For example, CSS presents monthly at the Fortune Society for each new cohort of individuals beginning services. Our work clearing obstacles created by clients’ criminal histories makes all of Fortune’s wrap-around services pay dividends, and, even though Fortune targets the reentry population, it does not have the expertise to fix conviction records or provide the sustained advocacy needed to address the denial of a job or a license to do a job.

**3,605 People
Benefitted from
Services Other
Than Direct
Legal Services**



OTHER SERVICES: TRAININGS

The CSS Legal Department helps foster staff professional development by providing paid time to attend conferences, continuing legal education programs, and other legal training programs. The Practicing Law Institute (“PLI”) provides CLE trainings to CSS free of charge; CSS attorneys avail themselves of this opportunity agency-wide. Legal Department attorneys regularly participate in webinars on topics relevant to their work, such as those presented by the New York City Bar Association, and NELA-NY. Dues for these organizations – and any others of interest to attorneys – are covered by CSS. CSS attorneys also develop professionally by providing trainings to nonprofit partner agency staff and clients on reentry-related laws and practices.

When new members join the CSS Board, which is generally once a year, they meet individually with the heads of each department, who describes its functions and goals and encourages further involvement.

IMPACT CASES

Aguilera, et al. v. Uber Eats:

CSS, along with IOLA grantee Youth Represent, represent clients who were denied delivery positions with Uber Eats because of their criminal history. This is a putative class action filed by the law firm Outten & Golden. The settlement is finalized and awaits court approval; should that occur, the company will redesign its hiring process to increase participation of people with criminal records and also pay monetary awards to more than 17,000 New York City residents.

Justin and Community Service Society of New York v. Milton Adair Tingling:

CSS is an organizational plaintiff in this civil rights class action filed by the New York Civil Liberties Union challenging the mass disenfranchisement of Black people—especially Black men—from the state court jury pool in Manhattan. Section 510 of the Judiciary Law disqualifies people convicted of felonies from serving on juries, no matter the offenses or how long ago the convictions occurred. This, we allege, violates the constitutional guarantee to a jury of one’s peers and to equal protection, and the primary goal of the suit is to declare Section 510 of the Judiciary Law unconstitutional.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

CSS has a pro bono partnership with Morrison and Foerster to file motions to, under CSS supervision, seal conviction records pursuant to C.P.L. §160.59. This program has involved 14 associates plus the Senior Pro Bono Counsel who oversees the project. Three motions have been granted and three are pending.

CSS provided law practice externship placement to two Brooklyn Law School students during each semester of the 2022-2023 academic year. These students were enrolled in the Youth Defense & Reentry Legal Services Clinic, which is taught by the litigation director at Youth Represent; CSS also teaches one class during the semester. In June 2022, we hosted a “Pro Bono Week” associate from Schulte Roth.

We have two retired senior volunteers in the Next Door Project who come to our office weekly. We will begin to recruit more volunteers in the following grant cycle.



15 Attorneys volunteered 70 hours

4 Law Students volunteered 168 hours

2 Other Volunteers volunteered 300 hours

Each  icon is equal to 2.1 volunteers.

Attorneys are represented through the Green Figure.

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

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

CSS's most significant collaborations remain with our community-based partners; specifically the ones with whom we contract or are funded to serve. These are the Fortune Society, ACE Programs for the Homeless, and Hour Children, all in Queens; Per Scholas in the Bronx; the Institute for Justice and Opportunity at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in Manhattan; and the New York City Department of Probation, where we collaborate with Youth Represent. CSS serves people over 27 while Youth Represent handles the younger cohort; we are in all boroughs except Staten Island, though those clients see us in Brooklyn.

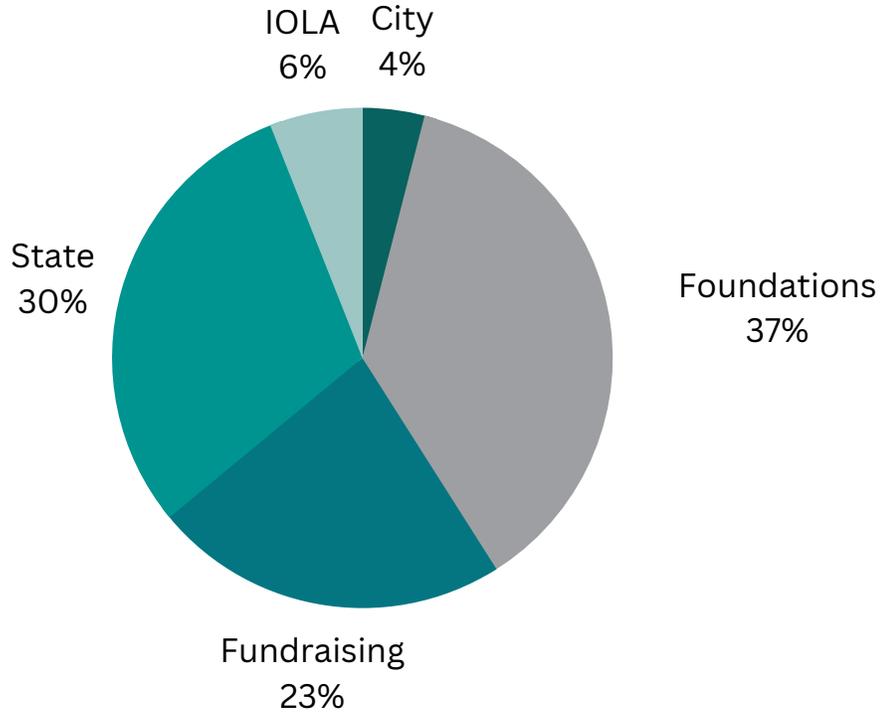
We also collaborate with the Legal Action Center, the Bronx Defenders, the Center for Community Alternatives, and the Hudson-Catskill Housing Coalition in the campaign to pass the Clean Slate Act in New York, which would automatically seal criminal convictions for civil purposes after a certain amount of time has passed since conviction or release from incarceration.

CSS continued its pro bono project through which law firm associates at Morrison and Forester represent CSS clients in C.P.L. §160.59 sealing cases. Six petitions have been filed; three have been granted and three are pending.

Finally, CSS participates in the Coalition of Reentry Advocates (CoRA), a statewide organization that promotes legislative and administrative reforms to alleviate collateral consequences of criminal convictions. Notably, CSS rewrote letters sent by the Department of Health to applicants and potential employers following issues with an applicant's criminal background check. Based on our clients' experiences, the letters both clarified when an employer could hire or retain someone with a criminal conviction and communicated the anti-discrimination laws that should frame its decision. We believe these letters will secure or preserve employment for hundreds of people each year statewide.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

Community Service Society received **\$1,243,026** in total funding this past year



Foundations	\$465,553
State Funding	\$355,383
Fundraising	\$292,090
IOLA Grant	\$80,000
City and County Funding	\$50,000
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Total	\$1,243,026