

HUMAN RIGHTS FIRST

2022-2023



OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

For 44 years, Human Rights First has provided free legal representation to indigent asylum seekers who come to the United States fleeing persecution, torture, and threats of death. If forced to return home, all face certain danger. And so, they endeavor to navigate the asylum process in the United States. But all too often, they do so alone. Having a lawyer greatly increases the odds of winning asylum or other immigration relief because the process is long, complex, and predisposed to denying legal protection.

Thanks to the generous support of the Interest on Lawyer Account Fund, we were able to continue our life-saving work in the New York area despite challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic. From April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023, we closed 285 cases falling under this grant, benefitting 332 individuals. During this period, we won asylum in 48 cases in New York, benefitting 88 asylum seekers and their family members. We also secured withholding of removal for one client. We obtained lawful permanent resident status (“green cards”) for 82 individuals, the majority of whom were asylees. One New York-based client became a U.S. citizen during this grant year. We were able to terminate or administratively close removal proceedings of 21 individuals, most of whom were Special Immigrant Juveniles whom we helped to file for adjustment of status. 13 clients obtained Temporary Protected Status with our assistance. Finally, 110 individuals successfully obtained their initial or renewed employment authorization during this grant year.

In addition, we provided community legal education services to 392 people, and legal and social services referrals to 777 individuals. And we conducted virtual trainings to equip volunteer lawyers with the skills to provide pro bono representation to our clients. During this period, we provided ongoing mentoring to 1015 pro bono attorneys working on asylum cases referred by Human Rights First.



Population Served: Indigent Asylum Seekers

Total Funding: \$4,117,300.00

Total IOLA Grant: \$73,941.00

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:

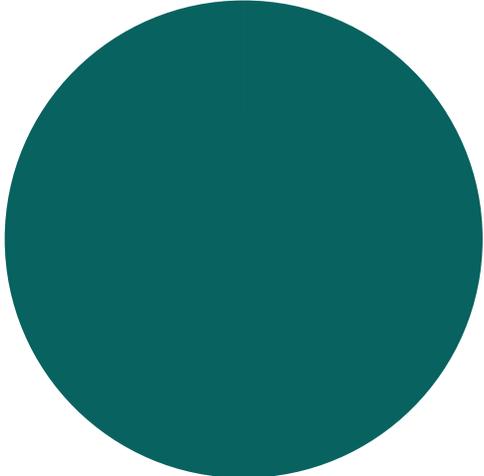
- Total Staff: 5
- Other: 2
- Lawyers: 3

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES: CASES

Ms. O is a Garifuna land rights activist from Honduras. Throughout her childhood, Ms. O experienced racially motivated abuse because of her Garifuna ethnicity. As an adult, she became a political leader for a grassroots organization advocating for the economic, social, cultural, and farming rights of the Garifuna communities. Because of her political activism, Ms. O was stalked, repeatedly threatened with death, and beaten by Honduran police. She lived in constant fear for her life. After one of Ms. O’s fellow activists was kidnapped, raped, and murdered, Ms. O fled to the U.S. Human Rights First secured pro bono attorneys to represent Ms. O. in immigration court and she was granted asylum.

Ms. S from El Salvador was subjected to two decades of horrific physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and outright torture by her former partner and the father of her six children. Neighbors repeatedly called the police on him, but the abuser was never arrested, including when he attacked Ms. S with a machete. Ms. S tried repeatedly to get herself and her children away from the abuser, but he refused to let her go and continued to torment her, including holding their youngest child hostage. In fear for their lives, Ms. S finally fled to the US with her children. With the help of pro bono attorneys Human Rights First found for her, Ms. S timely applied for asylum. However, Ms. S was diagnosed with PTSD, and it was a struggle for her and her equally traumatized children to construct a consistent timeline of their terrible experiences. Volunteer attorneys patiently worked with Ms. S throughout the 6 years when her case was pending at immigration court and hearings got endlessly rescheduled. It is a testament to their work that DHS agreed to a grant of asylum on papers, and Ms. S never had to recount her past trauma in court.

**332 people
benefitted
from
285 legal
cases closed**



Immigration
100%

Cases by Legal Problem Area

OTHER SERVICES: OVERVIEW

We aim to empower asylum seekers by providing them with know-your-rights information, basics of asylum law, and important policy changes. We committed to providing this service to 500 people during our two-year IOLA grant. During this grant year, from April 1, 2022, to March 31, 2023, we served a total of 392 people.

Until mid-March 2020, we offered weekly walk-in hours at our New York office during which we screened potential clients regarding their immigration legal needs and asylum eligibility. During each of those screenings, we provided all participants with know-your-rights information relevant to their immigration status. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, we have been conducting screenings and providing Know-Your-Rights information via telephone since March 2020.

Typically, twice per year, we hold asylum law trainings, which non-lawyers and community volunteers often attend. Attendees disseminate this information within the community. During this grant year, we conducted these trainings virtually.

**392 People Benefitted from Community
Legal Education Services**

OTHER SERVICES: TRAININGS

We provide frequent in-house trainings for our legal staff on a variety of immigration-related topics. Though these sessions are not mandatory, they provide valuable advice and information on asylum and immigration law. All volunteers assisting staff in the New York office are trained on asylum law basics, cultural competency, and interviewing trauma survivors, among other topics.

We encourage our staff to pursue other professional development opportunities, including trainings related to representing and working with vulnerable populations, such as indigenous language speakers, LGBTQ individuals, unaccompanied minors, survivors of domestic violence, etc. We take advantage of the numerous high-quality webinars regarding various aspects of asylum law provided by CLINIC, the Center for Gender and Refugee Studies, the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), the New York Immigration Coalition, and many others.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

To secure legal assistance for as many asylum seekers as possible, our NYC-based Refugee Representation team has spent years cultivating an extensive pro bono network with law firms, corporations, and law school clinics in New York and New Jersey. Through our pro bono mentorship model, our small team leverages its asylum expertise into big results by tapping the legal acumen of our pro bono network.

During this grant year, a total of 1302 pro bono attorneys were enrolled as volunteers in our New York Refugee Representation program. Of those, 1015 pro bono attorneys actively worked on cases referred by Human Rights First.

We offer free asylum law trainings twice per year—typically in June and October—for attorneys and community leaders in both New York and New Jersey. Participants often contact us after the training and express willingness to take on a case. During this grant year, all our trainings were virtual.

We also circulate an anonymized available case summary email to match clients whose cases we vetted and accepted into our program with pro bono counsel. We send these case-offer emails to pro bono coordinators at all of our partner firms (who disseminate internally) and to all volunteer attorneys who requested inclusion on our recipient list.



1,015 Attorneys volunteered 23,640 hours

1 Law Student volunteered 204 hours

4 Other Volunteers volunteered 807 hours

Once a pro bono team accepts a case, we assign them a Human Rights First mentoring attorney and legal services coordinator to guide them through the representation process. That Human Rights First team conducts an initial strategy call with the pro bono team and thereafter provides ongoing mentorship, support, and guidance. In doing so, we empower pro bono attorneys to become exceptional asylum advocates for our clients.

While our in-house team does tremendous direct work on these cases, our largest impact comes from mentoring the hundreds of attorneys with whom we partner on our cases throughout the New York metropolitan area.

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

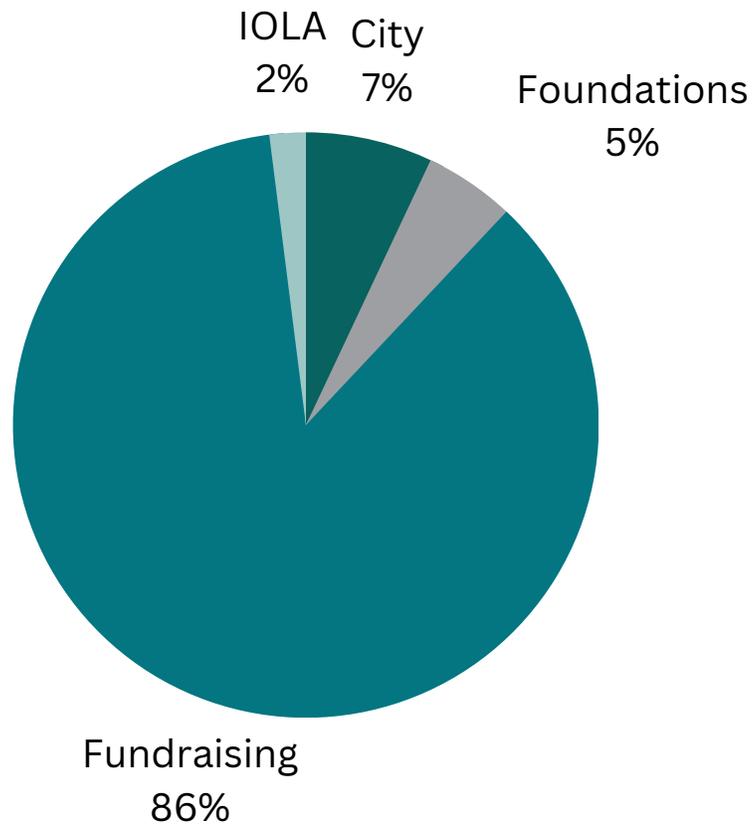
To secure legal assistance for as many asylum seekers as possible, our New York City-based Refugee Representation team has spent years cultivating an extensive pro bono network with law firms, corporations, and law school clinics in New York and New Jersey. Their resources and capacity act as a force-multiplier, significantly increasing our ability to provide quality representation to asylum seekers. During this grant year, a total of 1302 pro bono attorneys were enrolled as volunteers in our New York Refugee Representation program. Of those, 1015 pro bono attorneys actively worked on cases referred by Human Rights First.

On a national level, we participate in coordinating the efforts of groups focused on improving and supporting pro bono representation of asylum seekers, such as the American Bar Association, American Immigration Lawyers Association, and the Association of Pro Bono Counsel. We are also engaged in the Study Group on Immigrant Representation in New York, formerly led by Chief Judge Robert Katzmann of the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. This study group led to the creation of the New York Immigration Family Unity Project.

In addition to working with faith-based and other resettlement organizations that are members of Refugee Council USA, Human Rights First coordinates the advocacy efforts of a growing coalition of organizations and advocates across the country working to protect the rights of asylum seekers and refugees. We also work with advocates in the larger immigration and human rights communities, including We Are All America, to educate and mobilize them in response to attacks against refugees and asylum seekers. During this grant year, we were most actively involved in the Immigrant Advocates Response, which is made up of over 80 non-profit organizations providing or supporting legal services for New York's immigrant communities. We are also members of ICARE.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

Human Rights First received **\$4,117,300** in total funding this past year



Fundraising	\$3,560,609
City and County Funding	\$290,000
Foundations	\$192,750
IOLA Grant	\$73,941