

# **JOURNEY'S END REFUGEE SERVICES**

2022-2023

# OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

The Immigration Legal Services (ILS) Program at Journey’s End Refugee Services continues to dedicate our practice to U.S.-based immigration law, operating from four offices serving low-income immigrants across Upstate New York. This year, we closed 1,769 cases, benefiting 2,001 individuals; provided legal education to 556 community members; provided 156 individuals with pro se assistance; and referred 170 individuals for appropriate services. A total of 22 volunteers helped us meet these critical needs.

**Primary Target Population:** Our primary target population remains immigrants residing in the twenty-two counties we serve, whose incomes are below 125% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. Our target population includes refugees, asylees, pending asylees, immigrants with temporary status, immigrants with Special Immigrant Visas (“SIV”), undocumented immigrants, lawful permanent residents, naturalized U.S. citizens, and Afghan and Ukrainian humanitarian parolees. We continue to assist members of impacted immigrant communities as they navigated changing policies, lengthy case adjudication backlogs, and continued humanitarian crises. We focused efforts on immigrants who cannot afford access to counsel, cases of pressing humanitarian concern, and cases where attorney advocacy would significantly impact outcome.

**Dollar or other benefits realized:** Benefits from our services were substantial. This year, we helped qualifying individuals seek: protection from persecution (asylum and withholding of removal); protection from torture; temporary reprieve from returning to a country where conditions are unsafe; relief under the Violence Against Women’s Act; legal permanent resident status; and naturalization in order to become U.S. Citizens.



**Population Served: Low Income Immigrants and Refugees**

**Total Funding: \$2,019,504.56**

**Total IOLA Grant: \$150,000.00**

**Staffing Full Time Equivalents:**

- Total Staff: 26
- Paralegals: 2
- Lawyers: 16.75
- Other: 7.25

We petitioned for our clients' overseas spouses, children, parents, and siblings to reunite family units in the U.S. Many clients realized the additional benefit of work authorization, often crucial to obtaining sustainable employment, affording safe housing, and supporting a family. Clients were assisted in obtaining fee waivers where expensive government fees applied, saving \$51,685 in total.

**Increased access to justice:** This year, we increased access to justice through services provided to individuals that would likely be denied immigration benefits without our assistance. In immigration proceedings, represented individuals are substantially more likely to succeed in their legal matter. This is critical when consequences of denied immigration cases can include an inability to work lawfully, prolonged family separation, risk of civil detention, and even deportation to dangerous countries. We also helped to increase the availability of quality legal assistance through providing program support and technical assistance to Department of Justice ("DOJ") accredited agencies. Our work with Afghan parolees further expanded access to justice in a dire circumstance, after nearly 90,000 Afghans were evacuated to the U.S. without legal status and without an organized federal objective to safely resettle them.

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## DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES: CASES

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A married couple from Sierra Leone were represented in their defensive asylum cases before an Immigration Judge in Buffalo. Despite being from the same country, they did not meet until both were in Brazil. In Sierra Leone, the husband spoke out against the government and was attacked and persecuted because of it. The wife fled Sierra Leone because she was forced to undergo a physically harmful ritual that had roots in her tribe and ethnicity. We assisted each couple in submitting an asylum application, collecting, and reviewing evidence. We also assisted them in preparing for their final hearing. When we arrived at court for their final hearing, the judge and government attorney agreed to grant the clients asylum without extended testimony, which spared the re-traumatization that can often arise during a lengthy trial. This agreement between the judge and government attorney was because of the strength of their asylum applications and the strength of their evidence. After their grant of asylum, the married couple were able to start their new life in the United States, without fear that they have to return to their home country.

**Immigration, Family Reunification:**

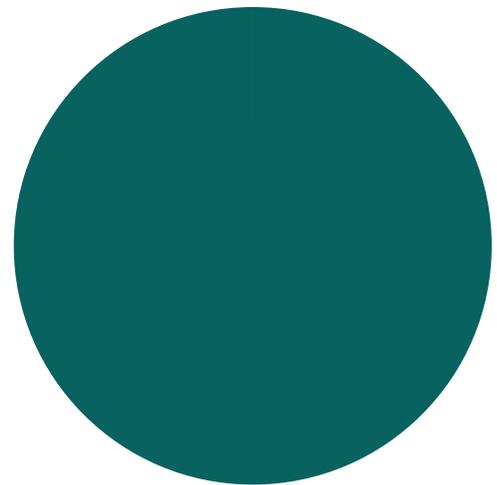
We assisted a client who was a lawful permanent resident to apply for her son, who was living in Ethiopia at the time of initial filing. Once the underlying petition was approved and a visa became available, we assisted the client with the necessary consular processing.

However, during this time, violence broke out in the Tigray region where the client’s son had been living in Ethiopia, and he was forced to flee to Sudan. Once reaching Khartoum, the client’s son was living alone and faced constant discrimination. At one point, he was robbed, kidnapped, and held for ransom. He was eventually released but was left lost and deserted, and once found by police, was sent back to Ethiopia, from which he had just recently fled.

We assisted the client in submitting a request to expedite the case based on the facts of this child’s situation, both to the National Visa Center and to the embassy.

We further advocated for swift action on the case through a Congressional Inquiry, and after working together with a local Congressperson, were finally able to have the case expedited, approved, and ultimately, the client and her son were reunited in the U.S.

**2,001 people  
benefitted  
from  
1,769 legal  
cases closed**



Immigration  
100%

**Cases by Legal  
Problem Area**

# OTHER SERVICES: OVERVIEW

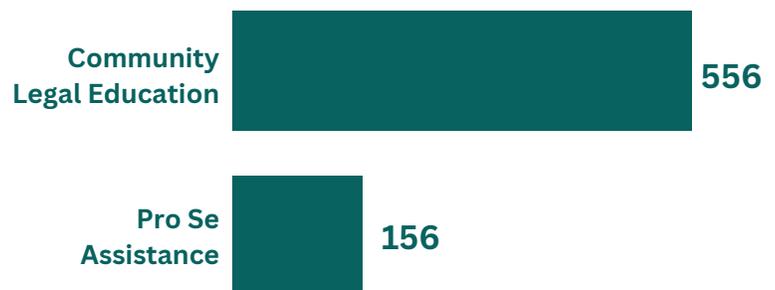
In addition to direct representation on immigration cases, we also provided community legal education, legal clinics, legal consultation days, and pro se assistance. At community legal education events, we presented to community members—immigrants, civically engaged non-immigrants, social workers, students, DOJ Accredited Representatives, and more at information sessions and trainings on topics including: Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Afghan Nationals; Uniting for Ukraine Program; Best Practices for Immigration Legal Clinics; Introduction to Interpreting in a Legal Setting; U.S. Tax System and Impacts on Immigration Status; Naturalization Oath Waivers; Overview of Affidavit of Support; Pressing Issues at the Southern Border; Presenting Conclusions in Forensic Evaluations & Affidavits for Asylum Seekers; Asylum Basics for Afghan Parolees; Family Based Immigration; Afghan Resettlement Issues and Concerns; and more.

We also provided legal clinics and legal consultation days where individuals received an attorney’s counsel or referral - held weekly at our Buffalo office and at multiple times each month at Jericho Road, Catholic Charities of Tompkins/Tioga, Catholic Charities Family and Community Services of Rochester, and the American Civic Association in Binghamton.

Our attorneys provided pro se assistance to individuals seeking adjustment of status, naturalization, employment authorization, family reunification, and asylum. After advising pro se applicants of the limited scope of assistance, our attorneys reviewed applications, explained any complicating issues, assisted in drafting addenda/cover letters, and advised on required evidence, filing deadlines, and submission protocol. Pro se efforts continued to be significant this year, as we assisted both Afghan and Ukrainian humanitarian parolees prepare asylum claims.

**712 People Benefitted from Services Other Than Direct Legal Services**

**Number of People Benefitted from Other Services**



## OTHER SERVICES: TECHNOLOGY

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Journey's End utilized Cerenade's elmigration platform, a cloud-based data-tracking software program, to record, organize and report all services provided by the ILS Program. The software provides a platform for case management for each client and legal matter, generated case reports, tracked USCIS and Department of State processing times, and is compatible with e-filing. Cerenade employs multiple layers of security to ensure client data is confidential and secure, including data encryption.

We also continued utilization of AILALink and Westlaw, significantly effective database subscriptions available to immigration practitioners. Migration of all digital files from an on-site file server to the SharePoint Online system has allowed for streamlined digitization and storage of closed files, ensuring that client data is accessible well beyond the legally required storage period. We are also piloting a WhatsApp broadcast list system to rapidly distribute information and resources to clients.

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## OTHER SERVICES: TRAININGS

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This year, all staff at Journey's End were trained on Secondary Trauma and Compassion fatigue, allowing us to be better prepared to identify and respond to these issues in ourselves so that it does not affect the quality of our services. Legal department staff were also trained on understanding trauma, trauma-informed care, and trauma stewardship. Attendant to the needs of trauma-affected immigrant populations, program staff were trained on bringing cultural sensitivity and trauma consciousness to their practice of immigration law. All staff were also trained on building tools to respond to individuals who are suicidal, as well as how to access necessary interventions when clients are in crisis.

Several additional trainings in immigration law and social service topics were made mandatory for ILS Program staff, as well as mandatory agency-wide trainings that included topics in Sexual Harassment, Cybersecurity Awareness, Crisis Services Programming, as well as Buffalo Niagara Partnership's Diversity & Inclusion Virtual Learning Series. Leadership staff were trained on Supervisor Responsibilities & Complaint Procedures.

# PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

Traditionally, we recruit volunteers and interns through our website, university job postings, and multiple legal service career events at the University at Buffalo Law School. This year, we hosted 1 volunteer attorney, 17 law students, and 4 undergraduate interns. To equip interns and volunteers for service, we substantially invest through internship orientation, substantive training on immigration law, and opportunities to shadow staff. Once trained, volunteers and interns are assigned tasks including assisting with intakes, evidence collection, assembly of filings, and file management. Interns and volunteers assist with direct representation cases under the guidance and close supervision of assigned Staff Attorneys.

This reporting period, our full-time third-year law student continued her placement with our organization under the New York State Pro Bono Scholars Program. Dedicating her time in the program to assisting Afghan humanitarian parolees, she helped coordinate intakes, planned a large-scale Afghan Asylum legal clinic, and provided referrals to pro bono attorneys for cases that could not be accepted directly due to capacity restraints. She also assisted attorneys on the direct representation of many of these cases, including asylum, family reunification, and Special Immigrant Visas. Her direct casework specifically included researching relevant case law, organizing exhibits for evidentiary filings, and preparing extensive reports on country conditions as they related to clients' claims for immigration relief.



**1 Attorneys volunteered 60 hours**

**17 Law Students volunteered 2,309 hours**

**4 Other Volunteers volunteered 130 hours**

Each  icon is equal to 2.2 volunteers.

Law Students are represented through the Green Figure.

Attorneys and Other Volunteers are represented through the Grey Figure.

# SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

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Collaborations are among our most valuable resources, helping us holistically address client needs through our own services and those of our partners. Our most significant collaborations come through our continued designation as NYS Office for New Americans Legal Counsel for Upstate New York, and in that capacity, our work with ONA Opportunity Centers across Western New York, the Finger Lakes, and the Southern Tier, and include American Civic Association in Binghamton; Catholic Charities Family and Community Services of Rochester; Catholic Charities of Tompkins/Tioga in Ithaca; and Buffalo-based Jericho Road projects Hope Refugee Drop-In Center and VIVE (an asylum shelter and physical location of our second Buffalo office).

Our collaborative efforts with these partners include: the provision of technical legal assistance; program development; mentoring of DOJ Accredited Representatives; trainings to staff on emerging immigration issues; frequent legal consultation days; pro se assistance; community information and Know Your Rights programming; intakes on cases for potential direct representation; and ongoing availability for assistance with immigration inquiries. By these efforts, we expand access to immigration legal services from qualified representatives in our service area.

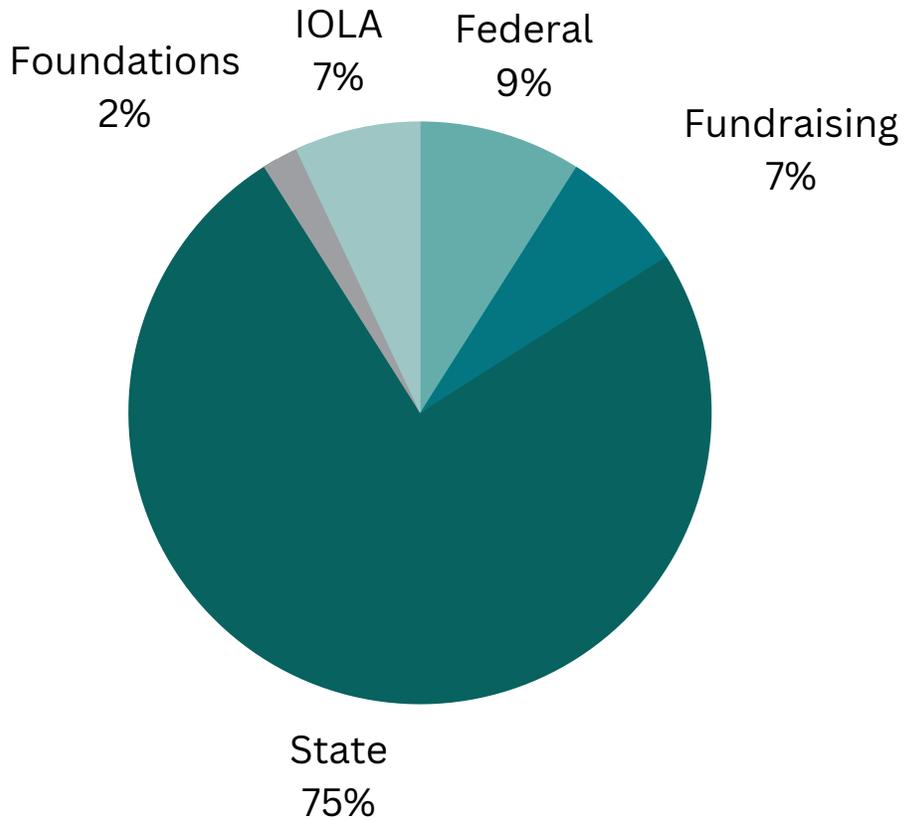
In addition to these efforts, we have also continued our commitment to local partners, including the Arab-American Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS) where we provide regular legal clinics, Justice for Migrant Families, the Survivors of Torture Program, where we provided clients with legal representation, case management, mental health services, and medical and forensic evaluations in partnership with Jewish Family Services (JFS), and University at Buffalo Human Rights Initiative.

We also continued to develop our collaborative efforts with other agencies who primarily serve the area's refugee population. Together with Catholic Charities of Buffalo, Jericho Road, International Institute of Buffalo, and JFS, we have formed The Refugee Partnership – a program designed to improve services for refugees and immigrants, increase advocacy and community integration, and enhance partnership with ethnic community-based organizations.

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# SOURCES OF FUNDING

Journey's End Refugee Services received **\$2,019,505** in total funding this past year



State Funding	\$1,490,120
Federal Funding	\$184,385
Fundraising	\$150,000
IOLA Grant	\$150,000
Foundations	\$45,000