Overview of Achievements, 2020-2021

Thanks in large part to the help of 2020-2021 IOLA funding the Hiscock Legal Aid Society (HLA) was again able to resolve a large number of civil cases and address the critical legal issues of low-income residents of our Central New York community. Our casework focuses on the essentials of life and includes representing clients in custody, domestic violence, divorce, child support, immigration, housing, and unemployment insurance benefit matters. The COVID-19 pandemic only increased the need for civil legal services, and our staff worked hard to meet this need while simultaneously transitioning to a primarily remote work environment and dealing with a court system that slowed down dramatically. During this funding year we closed 2,005 civil cases, benefitting 4,472 individuals. The practice area breakdown of the 2,005 closed cases is as follows: 605 family law; 604 immigration; 416 housing; and 380 unemployment insurance benefit (income maintenance).

The 380 unemployment insurance benefit cases closed this past year is a more than 500% increase over the 68 unemployment benefit cases we handled in the 2019-2020 IOLA year, a direct reflection of the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had, and is still having, on our community and an example of the critical role played by civil legal services in promoting community well-being and stability.

We are also proud to have handled our highest ever number of immigration cases, closing 604 in the past year. Thanks in large part to ongoing funding from the New York State Office for New Americans we are able to help address the dire need for immigration legal services in our community. Providing legal services to domestic violence survivors has been a long-standing priority of ours, and we have represented well over 3,000 survivors since 1999, including 446 in the last year alone. Our representation of domestic violence survivors is supported not only by IOLA funding, but by funding from the New York State Office on Violence Against Women that we receive in partnership with Vera House, Inc.

Population Served: Low Income Population
Area Served: Onondaga County
Total Funding: $3,881,664
Total IOLA Grant: $619,483
Staffing - Full Time Equivalents:
- Total Staff: 35.60
- Lawyers: 22.10
- Paralegals: 2.00
- Other: 11.50
Direct Legal Services

4,472 people benefitted
2,005 legal cases closed

We provided representation to multiple families who were illegally evicted from a building by a vindictive landlord who resorted to illegal self-help. While the families decided they did not want to be restored to possession of the premises and instead found new residences, we were able to establish that the landlord was liable for the wrongful eviction. A hearing on damages was held and we were able to obtain a thousand dollars in damages on behalf of the tenants. This was the first successful civil prosecution of a landlord in Syracuse under RPAPL § 768 since its enactment on June 14, 2019.

We represented a detained Lawful Permanent Resident who had been charged and convicted of a controlled substance offense and was facing removal from the United States. In addition to this prejudicial charge the case included complications about whether the Lawful Permanent Resident status was properly granted initially and whether the client met the statutory requirements considering the rollback provisions of the Cuban Adjustment Act. We were able to successfully argue cancellation of removal given the case equities outweighing the negative factors and the client was reverted back to Law Permanent Resident status. The client is now eligible for naturalization.
Number of People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>People Benefitted</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14,336 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Legal Education</td>
<td>14,107 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro Se Assistance</td>
<td>229 people</td>
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</tbody>
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Other Legal Related Services: Overview

HLA conducted 69 workshops and clinics benefitting 229 people, made 78 presentations to the community that reached a total of 14,107 people, and participated in 140 collaborations with a total of 946 other people. Some of the locations where we held workshops or clinics and where we made community presentations include, but are not limited to: Westside Learning Center; Jervis Public Library; Office for New Americans Opportunity Centers; InterFaith Works; Catholic Charities; BOCES; Toomey Residential; The Center; Workers’ Center of CNY; YWCA of Mohawk Valley; and the Utica Public Library.

In addition to providing direct representation and community outreach HLA serves as a major source of referrals for residents of Onondaga County and the surrounding region. Since we have been in existence for over 70 years many clients call us for help no matter their legal issue, and while we strive to provide direct representation to as many clients as people there are some areas of the law we do not handle or some people who are not eligible for our services. Each client who calls is screened for eligibility by a well-trained and knowledgeable Law Assistant, who opens a case in our case management system if the caller is eligible or, when possible, makes an appropriate referral if the caller is not eligible for our services. In the 2020-2021 year HLA made 2,229 referrals.

Other Legal Related Services: Examples

Unemployment Insurance Benefits

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic when thousands of business were shutting down and people were losing their jobs we were approached by a reporter from the local news agency, The Post-Standard/Syracuse.com, to conduct a live, online question and answer session on unemployment insurance benefits. This live stream was hosted on Facebook and Syracuse.com, and reached over 12,000 people.

Immigration

Given the changing laws concerning immigration we frequently provide Know Your Rights presentations to both the immigrant and non-immigrant community. One of the more successful presentations was a presentation on the interplay of human rights and immigration law that was hosted by the Workers Center of CNY and that was also streamed on Facebook, allowing us to reach nearly 500 people.
Trainings

Training and professional development are essential components of HLA. Our Management Teams take these obligations seriously, and make sure to provide professional, ethics, diversity and inclusion, anti-oppression, and cultural competency training to our staff. We maintain an Employee Portal on SharePoint, where staff can easily access policies, procedures, resources, and prior training materials. We also hold the following on-going intra-office meetings to allow for subject matter training and to foster professional growth: monthly Program meetings; monthly Practice Group meetings; bi-weekly Management Team meetings; and annual professional development and performance review meetings.

In addition, HLA has hosted a series of outside presenters who have presented at mandatory meetings of our entire staff. Professor Suzette Melendez, Esq., from Syracuse University College of Law, presented on diversity and inclusion, cultural competency, and anti-oppression. Sharon Ames, Esq., from the Regional Immigration Assistance Center Presented on unintended immigration consequences in Family Court cases. Angela Douglas, Co-Executive Director of Vera House, presented on preventing sexual harassment and discrimination. All of these presentations were recorded and are available for staff to watch upon onboarding with HLA.

HLA also maintains an agreement with the Onondaga County Bar Association (OCBA) that allows all HLA staff to attend OCBA CLEs in our areas of practice at no charge. While generally these CLEs have been in person, during the COVID-19 pandemic they have been and will remain virtual. HLA also provides all staff with access to video CLEs available through the Practicing Law Institute, online Sexual Harassment Prevention and Anti-Discrimination training through Chubbworks, and will pay for staff to attend NYSBA and other trainings and CLEs on an individual basis, as appropriate.

Board members also receive training, with all new Board members going through a Board onboarding and orientation process where they are trained on expectations and requirements and given an overview of HLA’s practice areas and Programs.

Technology

HLA continued to enhance and refine our data collection and reporting capacity in our case management system LegalServer through IT development, support staff training, and ongoing supervision of data entry. In addition, members of HLA leadership participated in the Central New York Community Foundation’s Performance Management Learning Community to increase data collection capacity.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic we have been providing the majority of our services remotely for the past year, and have made great strides in technological capacity to achieve this. All staff members now have webcams to allow for virtual meetings via Microsoft Teams with coworkers, community partners, and clients. We transferred phone service providers and switched over to a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) system, allowing all staff to be reachable at their HLA office line no matter where they are located. We have also made investments in laptops and other mobile technology to ensure that staff can provide high quality services regardless of whether they are in office.

Overall, these technological upgrades allowed us to transition quickly to a remote work environment when the COVID-19 pandemic began, and continued upgrades have allowed us to continue to provide our full-scope of legal services safely and securely throughout the pandemic.
Significant Collaborations

Hiscock Legal Aid maintains close working relationships with many agencies and community organizations in Central and Upstate New York, particularly in the areas of domestic violence, immigration, and housing. We accept case referrals from all such organizations and also utilize the resources and expertise of these partner agencies to provide the best possible assistance to our clients.

One of our more long-standing partnerships is with Vera House, Inc., the local domestic violence prevention agency. Through our partnership with Vera House we obtained funding through the New York State Office of Violence Services to provide representation to survivors of domestic violence in family court abuse and neglect cases, and also serve as a primary source of referrals for domestic violence survivors who contact Vera House and need divorce, custody, support, or order of protection representation.

We are also members of the Housing and Homelessness Coalition of Central New York, which includes agencies from Onondaga, Oswego, and Cayuga Counties working to reduce, and hopefully eliminate, homelessness. In our role as a primary provider of representation to tenants we coordinate closely with the City of Syracuse, Legal Services of Central New York, Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York, and Volunteer Lawyers Project of Onondaga County to ensure that we are representing as many tenants as possible, with the goal being that every tenant in need of legal assistance is able to obtain it. Our Foreclosure Prevention Project also works closely with Home HeadQuarters, Inc. to provide housing counseling and legal services to homeowners facing foreclosure.

Our expanded Immigration Program serves an 18 county region of Upstate New York, and works closely with community organizations throughout this large geographic region. Volunteer Lawyers Project of Onondaga County is subcontractor of ours on a portion of our funding from the Office of New Americans, and we collaborate closely with them to provide high quality immigration legal services throughout the region. Serving such a large geographic area also requires maintaining strong relationships with other agencies, including The Center, Joint Council for Economic Opportunity of Clinton and Franklin Counties, Catholic Charities Northside CYO, InterFaith Works, Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency, and many others.

We also continue to collaborate with the Syracuse University College of Law, speaking to classes about our work and hosting interns, externs, pro bono scholars, volunteers, and newly admitted attorneys. HLA also works with the Falk School of Social Work at Syracuse University to host a social work student who can assist clients access needed services.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

While Volunteer Lawyers Project of Onondaga County continues its role as the main source of volunteer implementation in Onondaga County we at HLA continue to recruit and develop interns, externs, pro bono scholars, and volunteers to aid in our representation and outreach.

We actively recruit interns and externs from the Syracuse University College of Law, participating in on-campus interviewing programs and speaking to externship classes. We also have a history of hosting pro bono scholars from Syracuse University College of Law. These interns, externs, and pro bono scholars provide vital support to our housing, immigration, and unemployment insurance benefit practice areas, increasing our capacity to assist those in need.

We also maintain an ongoing relationship with the Citizenship and Civic Engagement Program at Syracuse University, and have been the host for student placements for many years now. These undergraduate students assist us with outreach and community engagement, promoting our work and services to the wider community.

Pro Bono Statistics

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<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Volunteers</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Law Students</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1,892</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>617</td>
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Sources Of Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IOLA Grant</td>
<td>$619,483</td>
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<td>Foundations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fundraising</td>
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<td>State Funding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$3,881,664</td>
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