Overview of Achievements, 2020-2021

Three staff civil legal services and one volunteer lawyer organizations serve all or part of our area, each adopting a different and defined mission and delivery strategy. Working with our three partners in the region – Legal Aid Society of Mid New York (LASMNY), Hiscock Legal Aid Society (HLAS), and the Volunteer Lawyers Project of Onondaga County (OnVLP) -- we created a comprehensive and integrated civil legal service delivery system responding to the compelling needs of clients and client communities, ensuring the highest and most strategic use of available resources, and maximizing the opportunity for people to receive timely, effective, and appropriate legal services. LSCNY’s role in the system tracks our roots as an antipoverty law firm with the capacity -- and mandate -- to engage in legal strategies prohibited to or outside the mission and capacity of our partners. During the pandemic period, the executive directors meet frequently to discuss both organizational issues and client service.

Our primary target population: Low-income families and individuals in thirteen county service area: Broome, Cayuga, Chenango, Cortland, Delaware, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga, Oswego, and Otsego counties. LSCNY has two funding streams that benefit individual with HIV: a general civil legal services grant and a benefits counseling grant. We have a joint project funded by the Onondaga County Assigned Counsel Program (ACP) that assists people with re-entry issues and advises criminal defense lawyers on collateral consequence issues for their clients prior to resolution of charges. In 2020, LSCNY became a subgrantee of Vera House to offer domestic violence legal services in Onondaga County. With funding from a Lead Free Mohawk Valley grant from the Oneida-Herkimer Foundation and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant, we have a community organizer working in the Utica area on lead poisoning issues.

In 2016, we initiated the Community Counsel Project with funding from the IOLA Bank Settlement program. The Project works with community groups to meet their legal needs and develop their capacity to serve low-income neighborhoods. We have continued the project, working extensively and successfully on lead poisoning issues in the Syracuse area.

In January 2020, we moved to Legal Server after many years on Kemps Caseworks. As we moved into the work-from-home posture spurred by NY PAUSE, Legal Server proved to be an efficient tool keep our services available to the community and allow supervisors to monitor work accomplished by staff.

**Population Served:** General Low Income Population

**Area Served:** Central Region of New York State

**Total Funding:** $6,001,543

**Total IOLA Grant:** $1,383,116

**Staffing - Full Time Equivalents:**
- **Total Staff:** 54.00
- **Lawyers:** 37.00
- **Paralegals:** 6.00
- **Others:** 11.00
Direct Legal Services
8,274 people benefitted
3,941 legal cases closed

Examples

Mr. R, residing in Delaware County, called our Helpline complaining about an attempted illegal eviction. Mr. R rented a cabin for three years. The landlord decided he wanted to sell the property. His real estate agent entered the cabin without notice to show it to potential buyers. Mr. R objected. When the landlord learned this, he came to the house and was verbally abusive to Mr. R. The landlord yelled through the door demanding to be let in. He told Mr. R he had to leave immediately. Fearful, Mr. R did not let the landlord enter. The landlord picked up a large log from a wood pile and threw it through the front door, shattering the glass panes and narrowly missing Mr. R and his pets.

Mr. R called 911. Local police and a NYS Trooper responded. Mr. R demanded criminal charges be brought against the landlord. The Trooper told Mr. R it was the landlord's property and he could do what he wanted with it and declined to arrest. Mr. R feared further retaliation if he pursued a remedy. At this point, our staff attorney became involved and encouraged Mr. R to work with law enforcement to press criminal charges against the landlord and obtain an order of protection. We also worked with the State Troopers and the New York State Attorney General's Office to educate both the landlord and the Troopers that New York State’s new unlawful eviction law makes it a criminal offense to seek to evict a tenant without court process and police can make misdemeanor arrests for violations. Ultimately, we negotiated the client’s move as his situation was untenable.

Mr. M, a 22-year old refugee, was placed by an interfaith job placement service as a cold storage warehouse worker in March 2020 as the pandemic was beginning. Mr. M had chronic health problems, including gastrointestinal and respiratory illnesses. Mr. M lived with his mother who also had serious underlying health conditions.

Soon after beginning work, Mr. M complained to both the placement agency and his supervisor that pandemic workplace safety rules were not being followed by co-workers and managers. Although signs were posted requiring PPE, distancing, and other personal hygiene measures, warehouse management did not enforce or follow the rules. Mr. M resigned after three days. He was disqualified from UIB and charged with an overpayment of $7,960. After a hearing, the ALJ found that Mr. M had compelling health and safety concerns constituting just cause to quit. Mr. M was qualified for benefits starting March 29, 2020 and did not have an overpayment.
Other Services...

Number of People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>770 people</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Legal Education</td>
<td>770 people</td>
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Other Legal Related Services: Overview

With changes in the eviction law and the various state and federal eviction moratoriums, much of our work included training lawyers and judge’s. We have sponsored or provided trainers for eviction and unemployment insurance programs in Onondaga County, Broome County, statewide in conjunction with the NYSBA, and Cornell Law School.

Other Legal Related Services: Examples

7th Judicial District Special COVID Intervention (SCIP). We serve one county in the 7th Judicial District – Cayuga. SCIP moves eviction cases from Town and Village Courts to County Court. The project began in late 2020. Our staff attorneys have represented 28 household. The 5th Judicial District Access Committee has been considering starting a SCIP-type project, but has been delayed by the loss of County Court personnel to staff the project.

Onondaga County Housing Group Teams Project. This is a joint project including LSCNY, HLAS, and OnVLP. Our goal is to have a central resource we can use across our agencies to collaborate and share helpful information. The project uses Microsoft Teams to share documents, helpful cases, news articles, links, etc. We have also started a One Note document that we intend to model after CATRAP (an outdated eviction defense document assembly platform we developed in the early 1990s) with defenses, practice tips, citations, etc. There is also a messaging function for lawyers to communicate. We can put digital post-it notes on documents if we have comments. We will also create a document where we can share insight on judges hearing eviction cases. This will be a tool for new staff attorneys who will be practicing landlord/tenant, as well as those attorneys whose experience lies elsewhere but step into help.

New York Attorney General Pro Bono Eviction Project. Based on their regionwide pro bono project, LASMNY obtained a grant to increase pro bono resources for eviction defense cases.
**Significant Collaborations**

**5th Judicial District Access to Justice Committee.** We have been an active partner in the Committee from its inception. Our Executive Director serves as the chair of Eviction Subcommittee and sits on a subcommittee reviewing racial equity on Onondaga jury panels.

**Onondaga County Assigned Counsel Program.** LSCNY assists county residents with re-entry issues. We train and advise assigned counsel on collateral consequences of conviction prior to pleas and sentencing.

**Syracuse Police Accountability and Reform Coalition ("SPAARC"):** SPAARC is a grassroots community organization working on policy to create transformational change to policing in Syracuse. LSCNY provides legal support to the group. After the murder of George Floyd and the ensuing national movement, SPAARC and 14 other community groups came together to release the People’s Agenda for Policing. A comprehensive list of nine demands focused on changing policing in Syracuse. Included was a demand that the Syracuse Common Council pass the Right to Know Act. The Right to Know Act was a piece of legislation that LSCNY assisted SPAARC in drafting which requires that police officers provide individuals with a reason for being stopped, provide a business card with information about the officer to any individual they encounter, and robust data collection of stops throughout the city. In October 2020 the Common Council passed the Right to Know Act by a 7-1 vote.

**Co-counseling arrangements.** We have co-counseled litigation development and initiation with the New York Civil Liberties Union, the Syracuse University College of Law Clinical Program, the Central New York Fair Housing Council, and Disability Rights Advocates.

**Onondaga County Bar Association Diversity Efforts.** One of our staff attorneys is the chair of the OCBA Community Engagement Committee. The Committee sponsored well-attended panel discussions focusing on a range of topics including pandemic related topics. A panel focusing on Syracuse’s ReZone initiative scheduled to take place soon after everyone began working from home due the COVID-19 pandemic was rescheduled as a May 7, 2020 Zoom event.

**Lead-Free MV.** This is a continuing coalition of government and non-profits sponsored by the Oneida-Herkimer Foundation working on lead issues. We obtained funding from the Foundation and the Robert Wood Foundation to hire a community organizer to help affected families have a voice in the process. Our Utica Regional Managing Attorney serves as the chair of the Policy and Advocacy Committee.

Other groups with which we collaborated: the Coalition on Code Enforcement, the Syracuse Rental Registry Working Group, Jubilee Homes of Syracuse, National Action Network, Housing and Homeless Coalitions in Syracuse and Binghamton, the CNY Immigration Coalition, the American Civic Association in Binghamton, Community Services Society of New York, Center for Disability Rights, National Cancer Legal Services Network, Cornell Law School, My Father’s Kitchen, the NYS UIB Coalition, ACRHealth. The Binghamton Tenants Union, The Syracuse Tenants Union.
**Impact Cases**

**Building Equity in the Construction Trades:** In 2019 LSCNY and Urban Jobs Task Force (UJTF) released a report demonstrated racial disparities in the local construction trades. The report precedes the multi-billion dollar I-81 viaduct project. It is part of a larger advocacy plan to ensure an equitable share of jobs on that project go to Syracuse residents, and, more specifically, residents of color.

We received a commitment from the City of Syracuse to call a “Big Table.” The Big Table is currently run by a core team consisting of the City, UJTF, and LSCNY. The first Big Table meeting included the City, Onondaga County, NYS Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Authority, the trade unions, local workforce developers, and community advocates. Working groups were created to discuss creating policies and practices to help Syracuse resident’s get jobs on the I-81 project. LSCNY leads the working group on Community Workforce Agreements.

At a second Big Table meeting, implementation teams were announced to create specific policy agreements for the I-81 project. LSCNY was tasked as an implementation team leader for the Community Workforce Agreement team. The work accomplished by LSCNY and UJTF is a critical component in ensuring low-income and racially diverse Syracuse residents obtain equitable opportunity on the I-81 project.

**Tenant Dignity and Safe Housing Act; A00345A/S04595-A.** Using unrestricted funds, LSCNY drafted legislation for Assembly Member William Magnarelli to create Article 7-C of the Real Property Actions and Proceedings Law creating a simple special proceeding for tenants to seek orders in City, Justice, and District Courts directing landlords to repair hazardous conditions, reduce rent, and order damages to be paid to the Senate. The proposed legislation has been introduced with multi-sponsorship in the Assembly and Senate.

**Families for Lead Freedom Now!** Our Community Counsel project helped Families for Lead Freedom Now! advocate on behalf of community members for a lead ordinance in Syracuse. The comprehensive ordinance was enacted in July 2020.
Trainings

In pre-pandemic years, we train our staff in three ways – in-house events, bar-sponsored events, and webinars broadcast in our conference rooms. All attorney staff are members of the Onondaga County Bar Association and attend any MCLE session appropriate to their practice at no cost. The monthly Lunch-and-Learn sessions, the core of LSCNY’s in-house educational programs, were not conducted during the pandemic year. These will resume when we are back in the office. Three staff attorneys attended the remote four-day trial training at Cornell Law School sponsored by the Young Lawyer Section of the NYSBA. During the pandemic, period bar associations and other organizations have focused on eviction prevention and unemployment insurance. Our staff attorneys have not only attended the local and state programs, but have been presenters. The staff attorneys assigned to the new HIV Benefits Counseling Project attended the Cornell University Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability, successfully completing course work and obtaining credentials for a Work Incentive Practitioner Certificate.

All LSCNY’s lawyers are registered for and regularly attend no-cost programing by the Practicing Law Institute (www.pli.org). During the pandemic period, our lawyers have used this resource to attend more than 20 different programs, including Fair Housing Law and Practice, Strategizing Before a Negotiation, Subsidized Housing Basics, Nuts and Bolts of Medicare and Medicaid, Employment Discrimination Law & Litigation, Understanding Employment Law, and Class Action Litigation.

Technology

Computers
Most attorneys were already using laptop computers, but significant and continuing support was needed to assist working from home on a regular basis.

Phone system
Additional licensing for softphones was purchased to allow staff to use their office telephone extension remotely. Support increased significantly due to the instability of working remotely. Additional training was required as users became familiar with the software.

Network Capability
Since all LSCNY staff connect remotely through a VPN to the main office, internet bandwidth was doubled in the Syracuse office to handle the load caused by multiple incoming connections with data and voice over IP needs.

Remote support
Splashstop SOS was purchased to facilitate remote technical support.

Microsoft Teams replaced Skype for Business
Microsoft Teams was installed on all user computers. Users needed significant assistance with setup and training on use.

Adjustments based on evaluation of usage
What was adequate for persons working in the office with occasional remote work was found to be inadequate to handle the increased demand placed on technology by Microsoft Teams, unstable home internet connections, increased usage of video conferencing, and voice over IP. New computers were purchased and major upgrades were made to existing systems to handle those demands.
A new firewall and switches with increased throughput were purchased to increase the reliability of VPN connections.
## Sources Of Funding

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<th>Source</th>
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