Overview of Achievements, 2020-2021

The programs funded through IOLA for year two of this grant leverage technology to ensure access to a full continuum of legal options for low income and vulnerable individuals in New York State, ranging from early intervention tools and self-advocacy resources to limited scope pro bono and full representation. The existence and maturity of these programs played an essential role in ensuring access to justice and legal services during the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic, its profound disruption of in-person services, and the economic and social impact it had on low income and vulnerable communities. During this reporting period, a total of 1,685,843 individuals were reached through community legal education, pro se assistance, referral information, and online outreach by Pro Bono Net’s IOLA-funded programs. Our programs also recruited nearly 600 new pro bono volunteers from nonprofits and legal aid organizations through our platforms, and supported 386 organizations across the state in delivering vital legal services to low income and vulnerable New Yorkers.

More than 156,777 court forms and legal documents were assembled in New York using Pro Bono Net’s LawHelp Interactive program, including more than 14,156 Family Offense Petition (Order for Protection) forms. This represents a 21% increase in the number of DV protective orders remotely filed through the Family Offense Petition program, as incidents of domestic violence surged and courthouses across the state were physically closed. There were 818,825 visits to LawHelpNY by 663,078 users who viewed 2,234,681 pages. The "Find Legal Help" directory tool was used 257,377 times and organization profile pages were viewed 232,617 times. LawHelpNY’s trained volunteer operators provided information and referral-finding assistance to an average of 1,100 individuals a month during this reporting period, almost 32% of which are CourtHelp-related. In 2020, 225 LiveHelp volunteers from 20 law schools contributed over 5,752 hours of pro bono assistance through LiveHelp. LiveHelp usage overall has surged since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Since volunteer interest in the LiveHelp program continues to grow, we have asked volunteers to make a longer term commitment, in order to increase program efficiency. Therefore, the total number of volunteers this period decreased; however, the total numbers of volunteer hours remained consistent.

During the grant period our Immigration Advocates Network (IAN) provided referrals to over 52,100 individuals in New York across their platforms and conducted trainings for more than 20 additional staff and volunteers at organizations around New York on the use of Citizenshipworks, our award-winning platform for naturalization. More than 530 New Yorkers completed fileable N-400 forms through Citizenshipworks during the grant period. With the support of the New York State Office for New Americans, the IAN team is exploring how Community Action Agencies throughout the state can leverage Citizenshipworks to assist immigrant clients with their citizenship applications and connect them to free remote legal services. Our IAN team also continued working with Make the Road New York on the development of ¡Reclamo!, a digital legal tool to help make it easier for organizers and workers to identify and file wage theft claims.

Population Served: General Low Income Population

Area Served: Statewide

Total Funding: $2,330,932

Total IOLA Grant: $550,000

Staffing - Full Time Equivalents:

- Total Staff: 15.00
- Lawyers: 4.80
- Others: 10.20
### Number of People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Benefitted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,072,564  people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Legal Education</td>
<td>1,750 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro Se Assistance</td>
<td>29,818 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Outreach</td>
<td>1,459,040 people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Other Legal Related Services: Overview**

Through probono.net/ny, we connect volunteer attorneys to community legal education through webinars, newsletters, calendars of training events, and other resources. Our online legal libraries provide pro bono attorneys with tools to quickly acquaint themselves with unfamiliar areas of law. The site also gives legal services organizations a platform through which they can promote volunteer opportunities and equip volunteers with resources to provide high quality pro bono assistance. In Q2 2020, in response to the ongoing disruption of place-based services, we updated our online Pro Bono Opportunities Guide with information about programs offering remote pro bono opportunities.

Through LawHelpNY.org, we provide individuals with know-your-rights resources, self-help tools, court information, and local referral information. LawHelpNY is also designed to provide rapid access to referral information for intake workers, hotline staff, and community organizations. Additionally LawHelpNY’s referral directory is now available via API to make it accessible on other websites that individuals visit for legal help.

Pro Bono Net’s LawHelp Interactive platform allows low-income people without access to a lawyer to prepare their own legal forms online for free and gives overstretched attorneys a tool to improve their efficiency. LHI is also the backbone for many civil legal aid and court-based assistance programs in New York State and powers the New York Courts DIY forms program. In 2020, usage of forms related to domestic violence and wills and estates surged. The Family Offense Petition program, a collaboration between LHI, the New York Courts and DV agencies, helped a record number of DV survivors across the state – the most in the program’s history – complete and remotely file forms to ensure their safety and protection in Q3 and Q4 2020. Additional, commonly used forms include those for consumer debt; family law, including child custody and support; and landlord-tenant issues.

In addition, we continue to partner with JASA and the Center for Elder Law & Justice to expand usage of the Legal Risk Detector in New York, a legal issue-spotting and referral tool designed for use by social workers, medical personnel and other professionals working with older Americans. We are working with both organizations to spin off a New York version for increased stability and adaptability. We launched a new project, the Senior Financial Safety Tool Initiative with the Center for Elder Law & Justice to develop, a web-based tool designed to help staff at community banking institutions and in community outreach settings educate older adults about the risk of financial exploitation, screen them for vulnerabilities, and refer them to legal services if needed. The Legal Risk Detector and the Senior Financial Safety tool expand preventative legal outreach and assistance to the disabled, homebound and other elderly populations who are difficult to reach through traditional legal services models. We are exploring how these tools can be further utilized for online screenings during the COVID-19 crisis which has necessitated expanded remote services for legal aid.
**Other Legal Related Services: Examples**

Pro Bono Net’s Remote Legal Connect platforms (www.closingthegapny.org and www.familylegalconnection.org) allow legal services providers, pro bono initiatives, courts and community partners to rapidly build and manage a remote legal support program to increase access to legal assistance for communities in need, regardless of location. By enabling organizations to enroll, manage, and link volunteers with remotely located clients for advice, counsel and document preparation, the platform bridges barriers that prevent people from getting help and can dramatically expand the help available. During this reporting period, we worked with Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York and LIFT, to prepare to migrate these initiatives to a new, more robust and mobile-friendly version of the Remote Legal Connect collaborators, and to develop new training and support materials for advocates using the new platform in remote services.

Our Legal Risk Detector is an innovative early intervention tool and community outreach strategy to support at-risk elderly New Yorkers. This legal health “check up” tool is designed for use by nurses, social workers and allied professionals to screen seniors - particularly the homebound and disabled or isolated - for legal issues related to housing, consumer debt and financial exploitation. The tool proactively identifies issues that often go undetected or unreported among older adults, and facilitate referrals to legal services. For the fiscal year, 1,036 screenings were conducted.

Pro Bono Net continued its partnership with the New York State Office of Victim Services, the Empire Justice Center, and the Center for Human Services and Research at the University of Albany to build and enhance the New York Crime Victims Legal Network (CVLN), a partnership of organizations working together to address the civil legal (non-criminal) needs of crime victims. The central hub of that effort is crimevictimshelpny.org.

In 2020 and 2021, PBN further developed and designed the Advocate’s Gateway that includes a Jobs Board, Listserv, and Resource Library for attorneys. In addition, Pro Bono Net added an API and data-mapping functionality that connects organizational listings in the LawHelpNY Directory to the Legal Help Directory on the New York Crime Victims Help website. A language translation tool was added to the website that allows visitors to view pages in Chinese (Simplified), Chinese (Traditional), Korean, Russian, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Bengali, Italian, German, and Arabic. We built prototypes for the Victim Compensation Claim Application Guide and the Family Offense Petition Program. Moreover, Pro Bono Net partnered with a software developer to build a beta version of the Victim Compensation Claim Assistance App.
### Significant Collaborations

All of PBN’s programs are developed in collaboration with direct legal services and other justice partners, ensuring a more coordinated and strategic allocation of resources, greater participation by volunteer attorneys and lay advocates, and shared technology investments that can readily be scaled and adopted statewide. For example, on probono.net/ny, the NYC Pro Bono Center is maintained in partnership with the City Bar Justice Center and The Legal Aid Society. During this reporting period, we also worked with Mobilization for Justice to develop a plan to engage leading subject matter experts to update the Consumer Debt Defense practice area.

LHI’s long standing collaboration with the NYS Courts Access to Justice Program to promote the use of interactive DIY forms is a national model, and enables thousands of individuals in need throughout the state to prepare court forms every week. We also partnered with JustFix.nyc to launch a new LHI-powered Emergency HP Action tool, which allows renters to sue their landlord for emergency repairs. LawHelp Interactive auto-generates a court form that the tenant can e-sign and e-file through the JustFixNYC website.

Pro Bono Net operates LawHelpNY in partnership with our Advisory Committee: City Bar Justice Center, Legal Services NYC, Legal Aid Society of New York City, Volunteers of Legal Service, Empire Justice Center, Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York, New York State Bar Association, Legal Assistance of Western NY, Legal Services of the Hudson Valley, the Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York, and New York Legal Assistance Group.

Pro Bono Net was a founding partner in the Crime Victims Legal Network, and continues to work closely with Empire Justice Center, the Center for Human Services Research at SUNY Albany and the New York Office of Victims Services to enhance and build upon the NY Crime Victims Help website described above.

During this reporting period, LawHelpNY continued its LiveHelp partnership with the New York Courts and Legal Information for Families Today for the provision of LiveHelp live chat assistance on the Families and Children section of the CourtHelp website and Foreclosure section. LiveHelp is also offered on crimevictimshelpny.org and, in the wake of the pandemic, to visitors seeking probate resources on the NYSBA’s COVID-19 Pro Bono Recovery Task Force website. LawHelpNY collaborated with Empire Justice Center and LIFT to refresh training materials for volunteer operators in the areas of housing, family law, and public benefits. LiveHelp continues to be one of the widest-reaching legal live chat programs nationally. In 2021, we hired our Pro Bono Scholar from Touro Law School as a Senior Program Associate, and she now leads LiveHelp’s partnership with more than a dozen law schools throughout New York State and Pennsylvania.

On immigration issues, Pro Bono Net partners with the Brooklyn Public Library and local New Americans Campaign partners to host monthly technology-based naturalization events using Citizenshipworks. New Americans Campaign partners are listed in our previous GAR.
Pro Bono Net provides regular trainings to partners on how to maximize their use of our platforms. Trainings are conducted one-on-one and as part of an ongoing webinar series for partners that covers topics relating to the intersection of technology and legal services.

LawHelpNY provides extensive training to volunteers who staff the LiveHelp chat service, primarily law students and law graduates. Volunteers receive training on navigating and finding information on LawHelpNY, CourtHelp, the Crime Victims Legal Help Network, as well as the difference between legal information and legal advice. Additionally, volunteers participate in a live online training with the Senior Program Associate that includes training on cultural competency and unconscious bias and webinars on the most common legal issues facing visitors to LawHelpNY. The Senior Program Associate sends ongoing feedback and training for the LiveHelp Operators via weekly email newsletter. Through these emails, the Senior Program Associate incorporates program updates, tips on common questions and feedback on the chats that week.

In fall 2020, the Senior Program Associate updated training materials in the areas of housing, family, and public benefits to reflect recent changes in the law motivated by the pandemic. The Senior Program Associate also at times provides training and supervision to law student interns that participate in short-term projects that support the growth and improvement of LiveHelp.

Through the Immigration Advocates Network (IAN), Pro Bono Net offers trainings through our Immigration Advocates Network Pro Bono and Nonprofit Resource Centers. We list trainings by location, so New York based volunteer lawyers can find in person trainings in their area. Over the course of the grant period IAN offered a number of online trainings and resources, including several to help legal service providers respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our free training webinars addressed trafficking, how to refer Citizenshipworks applicants for virtual (online) legal review, how to set up a virtual legal review project, and more. We published a comprehensive manual to help nonprofits and pro bonos offer virtual (or remote) legal review: Remote Legal Support: A Guide for Nonprofit and Pro Bono Innovation. We had more than 13,000 visits to our Nonprofit Resource Center and more than 600 visits to our Pro Bono Resource Center from New York based advocates, to access our trainings, calendar, alerts, and materials.

We served as trainers for several major pro bono-focused trainings in 2020. In addition, PBN staff served as trainers in Increasing Access to Safety for Victims: Remote Filing in New York State, by the NYS Office of Court Administration; Language Justice During Covid-19, by the American Bar Association; and Technology Strategies for Remote Legal Assistance to Older Adults, hosted by the National Center on Law & Elder Rights. In addition, we co-designed and supported the design and execution of ongoing programming offered for the New York legal services community by the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice, the NYS IOLA Fund and NYSTech Committee, and our staff attended several national conferences during the grant period, speaking as experts in the field, including: Statewide (New York) Civil Legal Aid Tech Conference; ABA/NLADA Equal Justice Conference; Pro Bono Institute Annual Conference; NLADA Annual Conference; NYSBA Annual Meeting; LSC Innovations in Technology Conference; and others.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

Pro Bono Net recruits, trains and deploys pro bono attorneys and non-attorney volunteers in several ways. The LiveHelp program of LawHelpNY relies exclusively on volunteers to staff the chat service. Volunteers are typically seeking to fulfill the 50-hour pro bono requirement for admission to the New York State bar. The majority of our LiveHelp volunteers are law students or recent law graduates, though we occasionally have volunteers who are barred attorneys, both in New York and out. LiveHelp generally draws on 30 to 40 volunteers at any given point in time to ensure adequate coverage of the bilingual LiveHelp service Monday to Friday 9am to 9pm. Our volunteers help visitors navigate the site and find the information they need to move forward, but do not offer direct legal advice or services.

Probono.net/ny offers a range of tools that support and facilitate the work of pro bono volunteers. Pro bono attorneys use probono.net/ny’s eight practice areas to find volunteer opportunities, training materials, a calendar of local training events, and other support services that make it easier to get involved. These tools also increase the capacity of legal services providers to train and recruit volunteers, circulate available cases and communicate with their volunteers. During this reporting period, probono.net/ny added more than 600 members. In addition, the Pro Bono Resource Center of the Immigration Advocates Network supports more 300 pro bono members in New York. We also updated the New York Pro Bono Opportunities Guide with information about programs offering remote volunteer opportunities. The Guide was viewed more than 35,000 times in 2020.

Throughout this reporting period, Pro Bono Net’s staff also served as trainers in webinars and events focusing on the use of technology to expand access to assistance during the pandemic. Notable trainings we participated in with a strong pro bono focus include Remote Legal Services – How Nonprofits Can Innovative to Reach Clients and Pro Bono Attorneys During Covid-19, by the Practising Law Institute; Pro Bono Strategies in Emergency Response to COVID-19, by LawLine; Models and Strategies for Remote Legal Services Delivery and Responding from 6 Feet Away; Lessons Learned from Pandemic and Disaster Response and Using Innovative Technologies, with PLI and LSC; and Pro Bono Zooms Into the Future: An Interactive Workshop, with the Pro Bono Institute. Combined, these trainings reached more than 1,000 pro bono attorneys and pro bono program managers.

Pro Bono Statistics

Law Students : 225 Volunteers 5,752 Hours

Sources Of Funding

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<tr>
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