Overview of Achievements, 2020-2021

ASC engaged with over 1,096 people, providing them a combination of information, advice, limited legal services, and full representation. ASC closed 550 cases, which assisted 568 people. ASC conducted a total of 546 intakes. 412 people were provided brief legal services by ASC. The 157 cases closed with a miscellaneous benefit were cases where we provided HIV+ people who do not qualify for a way to legalize their immigration status with a letter certifying these circumstances so they could qualify for housing and other benefits provided by New York City for HIV+ people living under these circumstances; 70 people were consulted on the legal implications of public charge rule on their status/ability to obtain status.

Primary target population
African Services Committee (ASC) provides legal services in the areas of benefits, family, housing, and immigration law. It participates in impact litigation lawsuits to advocate for and defend the rights of either our clients or members of the target populations that we serve. The primary target populations for services at ASC are: (1) members of the African diaspora; (2) immigrants of all backgrounds; (3) people living with HIV or AIDS; (4) people who identify as LGBTQ; (5) people that have experienced mental trauma and are seeking counseling and legal services; (6) women who are survivors of gender-based violence because the current level of victim services in the community and (7) existing clients for ASC’s non-legal programs.

Dollar or other benefits
ASC secured a total of $37,072 in either direct dollar benefits or savings to its clients. $22,237 of this total was in direct dollar benefits. ASC helped HIV+ people who are unable to qualify for a lawful immigration status in the United States obtain legal certifications that allow them to qualify for, and receive, both housing placement and monthly rent allowances. ASC secured $14,835 worth of fee waivers from USCIS who were either unable to secure a fee waiver or could not afford fees for applications; experts; or specialists.

Population Served: members of the African diaspora; immigrants of all backgrounds, people living with HIV or AIDS; people who identify as LGBTQ; and existing clients for ASC’s non-legal programs; low income populations

Area Served: Bronx, Queens, Kings, New York, Westchester, Nassau, Richmond, Orange, Dutchess

Total Funding: $1,336,614.50
Total IOLA Grant: $62,000.50

Staffing - Full Time Equivalents:
- Total Staff: 15.10
- Lawyers: 5.50
- Paralegals: 4.60
- Other Staff: 5.00
Mr. Client is a long-time client of African Services Committee. For years he sought legal assistance but was ineligible for any form of immigration relief. Over time ASC was able to secure certain transitional benefits for him, but his life was on hold because of his undocumented status. In 2017, Mr. Client told us he was married and ready to apply for his green card. Unfortunately, while we prepared his case, the issue of Public Charge became a serious potential obstacle for clients like Mr. Client, who have an underlying medical condition, and rely on sporadic employment and certain public benefits. At the time, we were uncertain how the new rules would be applied, and whether they would be applied retroactively to pending applications. He was concerned about starting the process without knowing the answer to these questions. We guided Mr. Client through the process of navigating the Public Charge rule and its implications, making sure he was not receiving any benefits that might adversely impact his eligibility to adjust status. By early 2019 it became clear the rule would not be applied retroactively, and he decided to take the plunge, right before the rule was to be implemented. In September 2020, he was successful in his adjustment interview and now has legal status. As a bonus, because he waited two years before applying, he was also able to avoid the two-year, conditional resident card, and has been granted full Lawful Permanent Resident status.
In February, we secured legal status for a HIV+ gay man who is financially supporting his disabled husband. This client had previously received services at ASC for several years. He is a citizen of Mexico and was orphaned as a newborn. As a result, he was raised into adulthood via the Mexican foster care system. Despite growing up in these challenging circumstances, he was able to pursue higher education. He earned a degree in Industrial Engineering from the University of Guatemala. After graduation, he secured a good job with a petroleum company in Mexico. Unfortunately, when the local gangs discovered that he was gay, they decided to use this information to blackmail him in order to exploit his position at the petroleum company for their criminal purposes. He was placed in an impossible position. If he cooperated with the gangs, he would risk imprisonment as an accessory to their crimes. Or if he refused the gangs’ demands, he would risk being harmed and killed by either the gangs, or anyone who wish to harm him because of his sexuality after the gang revealed his secret. To save his life, and escape these awful circumstances, he fled to the United States.

By the time Mr. Client came to the attention of the legal staff, he had previously received poor legal advice, which he followed, and as result adversely affected his eligibility to qualify for asylum. Given these circumstances, he was unable to legalize his immigration status. Therefore, ASC staff focused on helping him secure ADAP and housing assistance. To support himself financially, Mr. Client sought work wherever he could find it given his lack of legal ability to work in the United States. For a time, he was able to find opportunities working in construction. However, when Federal officers began regularly raiding construction sites looking for undocumented immigrants, the client began to fear that he would be caught and deported as a result. However, Mr. Client’s circumstances changed for the better. He began a relationship with a former co-worker, and they were married in 2017. Since his co-worker was a United States citizen, Mr. Client was now eligible to obtain Lawful Permanent Resident status via a family-based visa petition by his spouse. Unfortunately, what normally would be a straight-forward application process for Mr. Client, became fraught with risk and complexity as the Department of Homeland Security issued its first round of changes to the public charge regulations governing adjustment of status applications for immigrants who were pursuing family-based visa petitions. Sadly, Mr. Client’s spouse had become physically disabled the result of a workplace accident. His spouse also received HASA benefits. As the various versions and rewrites of the regulations created so much confusion among both legal advocates and the public, Mr. Client became frightened to access HASA benefits under his husband’s case because he believed it would defeat any hope of overcoming the new regulations. He was afraid that a failed attempt to legalize his status would result in his deportation from the United States. ASC began to counsel Mr. Client about benefits law as well as the new and evolving public charge regulations. Before he could seek permanent legal status and/or the public benefits he needed, it was necessary for the legal team to help him distinguish between benefits eligibility, benefits fraud, and the collateral consequences of benefits use. Once he was properly advised, and his eligibility to qualify under the new regulations was confirmed, Mr. Client’s application was submitted and granted. Mr. Client is now back at work and preparing to enter a graduate program in engineering. Meanwhile, he has been added to his husband’s HASA case, and reports his earnings carefully. Within one year, his fortunes and his future have been completely changed.
Other Services...

Number of People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>88 people</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Legal Education</td>
<td>88 people</td>
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</table>

Overview

Unfortunately, we had to temporarily stop KYR presentations due to COVID concerns. We have put information out via our social media and 88 people engaged with our postings. We are gearing up to do them remotely through women’s group that we have established during the pandemic.

Collaborations With Other Service Providers

ASC receives referrals from a range of trusted providers, including Action NYC Grants, Safe Horizon, Sanctuary for Families, Catholic Charities, Bellevue Hospital Program for Survivors of Torture, Libertas Center for Human Rights, and the Door.

ASC refers persons from the target population who cannot be served at ASC (e.g., because of a conflict of interest, capacity, or eligibility issue) to ASC’s pro bono partners, including Hughes Hubbard & Reed LLP, White and Case and Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP, law school clinics and to other legal providers, including: Sanctuary for Families, Safe Horizon, Catholic Charities, Urban Justice Center, New York Legal Assistance Group, Safe Passage Project, and the HIV Law Project. Staff also refers clients to ASC’s comprehensive range of services (including linkage to primary care, COVID-19, HIV/STI/TB and viral hepatitis testing, case management, AIDS housing placement assistance, mental health services, ESOL classes, food and nutrition services, and screening for diabetes and hypertension. ASC’s Legal Department has also developed a strong referral network for a range of health care and social services, as follows. Programs for survivors of trauma: Bellevue Hospital Program for Survivors of Torture, Libertas Center for Human Rights at Elmhurst Hospital, Mount Sinai Center for Human Rights; Hospital HHCs for medical and mental health support: Metropolitan Hospital, Bronx Lebanon Hospital, Montefiore Hospital, Harlem United Hospital, Jacobi Medical Center, Elmhurst Hospital, Kings County Hospital; Social services: Harlem Children’s Zone, AIDS Service Center, The Door, Sauti Yetu, and Sanctuary for Families.
Other Services...

Technology and Other Innovations

ASC has been actively using various technology improvements to be able to switch to remote work, such as: (i) conducting meetings via zoom; (ii) using whatsapp group for emergencies; (iii) using gchat; (iv) utilizing google voice to make phone calls; (v) utilizing google drive and its applications for collaborative group projects.

Training

ASC offers training and professional development activities to staff, management, volunteers and board members. ASC provides regular substantive trainings to staff through Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC), Practicing Law Institute (PLI), New York Immigrant Coalition (NYIC) and Community Service Society (CSS) Benefits Plus.

ASC also conducts trainings covering topics such as diversity and inclusion, anti-oppression, cultural competency, and HIPAA both in person or as webinars. ASC’s attorneys provide comprehensive trainings to legal interns and externs in areas such as immigration, housing, and benefits law. ASC’s attorneys provide training and mentorship to volunteer attorneys and attorney at pro bono law firms who accept cases referred by ASC.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

Facing an increased need for additional staffing and resources ASC was able to successfully utilize various kinds of volunteer help who contributed a total of 1,746 hours. Even though it has been much more challenging to engage volunteers remotely, ASC engaged 3 attorney volunteers, 7 administrative volunteers, and 15 law student volunteers. ASC has also been able to secure a Fellow who would help staff some of the ICLC cases and help with housing cases when the moratorium is lifted. Even though we had pro bono attorneys working on some of the cases, none of those cases have been adjudicated and closed due to USCIS delays.

ASC enjoyed a sharp increase in volunteers by continuing to develop a more structured volunteer program and a system to match students’ course requirements with the legal department needs by providing them with comprehensive trainings, regular check-ins and communicating via Whatsapp. ASC hosted a large number of undergraduate students that were taking a political science course. They were successfully partnered with the attorneys who needed help with research and translations. They also fully took on all the screening calls and some of the PRUCOL screenings that come through the hotline as ASC does not have a specifically designated intake person.

ASC also worked with a large number of students from Columbia Law School (“CLS”) who were looking to fulfill their 40 CLS and 50 NY Bar requirement and who helped our team immensely with substantive work during a period of substantial staff turnover and increased volume of work.

Pro Bono Statistics

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<th>Category</th>
<th>Volunteers</th>
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<td>Attorneys</td>
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<td>Law Students</td>
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<td>Other Volunteers</td>
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Sources Of Funding

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<th>Source</th>
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<td>Foundations</td>
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<td>State funding</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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