Overview of Achievements, 2020-2021

The Legal Project has always prided itself on serving low- and moderate-income residents of the Capital Region using cost-effective and innovative strategies in the provision of legal services. Over the past year, those strategies were truly put to the test when the state shut down for what most of us initially assumed would be a few weeks, perhaps a month. Now, over a year later with life starting to move forward with a “new normal”, we look back at our achievements, some of which are not quantifiable in dollars or cases closed.

Technology was something that our staff used in the provision of legal services but there was a level of discomfort surrounding it. That quickly changed when we started working remotely. Zoom is now commonly used for client meetings, court appearances, meetings with opposing counsel, and department meetings. Our staff has discovered apps which make it easier for clients to send documents and pictures in a timely manner. We worked with clients who did not have internet access by using texting, Google Voice, and other apps. There have been great successes – advances in our Legal Clinic program a prime example – but also advances in the way we think about providing legal services. It was not enough to offer clients a technology solution – we also had to be compassionate enough to teach them how to use the technology, and to recognize that access to technology is not a given for our clients. We plastered signs on our floors marking “one way” but we found new ways to access justice for our clients. We found new ways to connect, to prove our flexibility, and our resiliency. In a tradition bound arena such as law, nimbleness and agility are not a given. The Legal Project used the message, “We Can Do It” to realize that “one way” is not the only way. We have learned lessons in grit and resiliency; we have learned to approach problems with flexibility and to “think around corners.”

While the state was on “Pause” we continued to provide legal services to nearly 12,000 low- and moderate-income individuals in the Greater Capital District Area by offering legal information, advice, representation, and referrals utilizing primarily our staff attorneys but also some of our truly steadfast pro bono attorneys, dedicated program staff, law students and other community volunteers. We obtained over a half million dollars in settlements for our clients and achieved nearly $70,000 in savings for our clients. During this past year, our staff also achieved over $40,000 in fee waivers and court filing fees for clients who were already struggling to make ends meet.

**Population Served:** Low Income Women and Families

**Area Served:** 4-County Area in Eastern New York

**Total Funding:** $4,411,481

**Total IOLA Grant:** $446,370

**Staffing - Full Time Equivalents:**
- **Total Staff:** 21.85
- **Lawyers:** 11.20
- **Paralegals:** 4.75
- **Other:** 5.90
Consumer/Finance Housing:
It is not uncommon for a client to reach out to our office needing assistance in one matter and then be referred to another in-house program for additional services. A Saratoga County resident first came to TLP for assistance with representation in a foreclosure matter. After a legal consultation was provided and options were pursued, the client decided not to keep the home. TLP assisted with a settlement: our client would consent to foreclosure and $4,000 would be given for moving expenses. This case concluded and our client then came into our bankruptcy program shortly after to discharge credit card debt and the promissory note.

Immigration:
A client and her daughter were brought by her husband to the United States from Dominican Republic. He constantly abused them and mistreated them, and would often threaten to call ICE and law enforcement. She was not aware of her rights and options and reached out to our office for legal advice after being referred from her local church.
Other Services...

Number of PeopleBenefitted by
Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>6,108 people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community legal Education</td>
<td>6,000 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro Se Assistance</td>
<td>108 people</td>
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Overview of Legal Related Services

Uncontested Divorce Clinics are conducted with the assistance of Legal Project staff, staff attorneys, pro bono attorneys law students, and paralegals and the goal is to provide assistance to low income individuals with the preparation and filing of the necessary documents in pro se divorce actions. During this reporting period, we conducted 1 of these clinics and suspended all in-person clinics due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. We anticipate on resuming in-person clinics at the end of summer or early fall. Additionally, we are working with a law firm partner in developing an on-line process thereby allowing for additional access for individuals who are unable or uncomfortable attending an in-person clinic.

Legally Speaking Workshops offer free, custom designed education programs to community groups and organizations on a wide variety of legal topics. Each workshop is tailored to the requesting group’s needs and is provided by either a staff or pro bono attorney.
Other Legal Related Services Examples

Legally Speaking: Two staff attorneys participated in a presentation on Facebook Live coordinated with the Saratoga Immigration Coalition. This workshop was targeted to the public and was bilingual in English and Spanish. Our staff attorney presented an overview of immigration relief that may be available to survivors of domestic violence, and also gave some information about how to prepare for an immigration application.

Uncontested Divorce Clinic: A woman contacted our office for assistance with filing out the uncontested divorce paperwork and was incredibly frustrated and overwhelmed in trying to understand the paperwork. She did not have any children, no property that needed to be divided, and her husband was just an anxious to get divorced. She attended an Uncontested Divorce Clinic and met with a paralegal who assisted her with filling out the correct paperwork. Within 3 weeks she contacted our office for further instructions and was given the information by our Legal Services Coordinator and was able to complete the divorce.

Significant Collaborations

Our Office of New Americans staff attorneys and our Human Trafficking attorney provided several community education trainings via Facebook Live, partnering with both Lifeworks (formerly Saratoga EOC) and the Columbia County Sanctuary Movement (CCSM). They provided an educational training through both Lifeworks and CCSM directed toward immigrant community members regarding Expedited Removal. Since February, they have been providing a series of trainings on new immigration changes under the Biden-Harris Administration. In February, they provided this educational training through Lifeworks, and in March do so through both Lifeworks and CCSM.

We partnered with Albany Law School, Capital Region Bankruptcy Bar Association, Legal Aid Society of NENY, and Schenectady County Bar Association to offer two virtual legal clinics through Zoom for Schenectady County residents. The Legal Clinic Program staff scheduled the pro bono 30-minute consultation appointments for Schenectady County residents with volunteer attorneys.

Capital Region Bankruptcy Bar Association, and Schenectady County Bar Association recruited attorneys to volunteer. All partners assisted with promoting and marketing these virtual events.

The Legal Project formed a partnership with Union College and the department of Political Science Internship Program. The partnership began January 11, 2021 and will continue until June 4, 2021. Two student interns have been hired to assist with the coordination of the Virtual Legal Clinic Program.

The Small Business Brief Legal Advice Program is a partnership with Albany Law School Justice Center, Community Loan Fund of the Capital Region, Small Business Development Corporation, and University at Albany Institute of Nonprofit Leadership and Community Development. This program provides pro bono 30-minute private legal consultation services to the Capital Region small business and entrepreneurship community.

Typically, the consultations occur in-person. However, because of COVID, we have been offering this program virtually through Zoom video conferencing service. During this reporting period, we hosted 4 small business virtual legal clinics and had over 50 clients participate. The Legal Project collaborated directly with Albany Law School Justice Center to recruit attorney volunteers and Albany Law School student volunteers. The student volunteers observe the consultation between the attorney and the small business client. Albany Law School assisted The Legal Project with promoting and marketing these virtual events.

The Legal Project has been in partnership with LIFT for over 3 years to provide referral services to individuals in need of family law advice. LIFT provides pro bono 1-hour private legal consultation services to the Capital Region community. During this reporting period, we have had 118 LIFT referrals.
With the COVID-19 Pandemic, we had to shift to using technology almost immediately to provide legal services to our community. We had always used Zoom for meetings and for some client meetings but within a few days, every staff member started to use it to “meet” with clients, for department meetings, and eventually for court appearances. Our Legal Clinic coordinator devised a Zoom legal clinic system, that has become incredibly successful and may change how we offer legal clinics going forward. There are 5 monthly legal clinics and 19 volunteer attorneys, with approximately 4 attorneys present at each legal clinic. There is also 1 Veterans monthly legal clinic which has 1 volunteer attorney. Offering pro bono legal consultations through our Virtual Legal Clinic Program has been a positive experience for both the litigant and the volunteer attorney. Due to the convenience and availability of the Virtual Legal Clinic Program through Zoom’s services, there have been less no-shows and an increase in participation compared with those past in-person Legal Clinics. As a result, we have an 86% retention rate. This is the highest retention rate we have had for the Legal Clinic Program!

Additionally, our staff have been using cell phones and the many apps that make communicating with clients a bit easier. Staff attorneys have been communicating with clients through text and WhatsApp and this has been an unexpected improvement in our level of communication. In particular, staff have encouraged clients to text photos of letters they receive or documents they need to submit. It seems that clients are much more able to text photos than to find a scanner / copier, so we receive their documents in a much timelier fashion.

At The Legal Project, we are dedicated to supporting our board and staff through offering various professional development opportunities that strengthen them in their diverse roles. Staff received training in responding to sexual assault cases as well as trauma informed representation and responses. We also provide staff with as many opportunities as possible to attend professional conferences and CLE training sessions. Board members are also invited to attend CLE training sessions and many do participate in community information forums and CLE events.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

The Legal Project uses pro bono attorneys, law students and pro bono scholars, undergraduate interns and volunteers, paralegals, and other community volunteers in the provision of legal services. We are a recognized field placement for Albany Law School, and the other local Universities and many of our volunteers learn of our available opportunities through “word of mouth” by current and former volunteers. We employ a Pro Bono Coordinator who works with our Legal Director in the recruitment and training of pro bono attorneys. Our Legal Director provides mentoring and other support for our current volunteer attorneys.

During this reporting period, we developed and conducted a virtual Basic Estate Planning training in an effort to recruit additional attorneys to join our Wills Pro Bono Panel.

The Homeowner Protection Project has incorporated a pro bono scholar through partnership with Albany Law School and has been very beneficial in assisting in many areas. She was able to assist our staff attorneys by preparing Motions to Withdraw, Answers, and responding to clients.

We have a “superstar” pro bono attorney who accepted 26 referrals and represented children in obtaining Special Immigration Juvenile Status. This attorney represents children both in the state court proceedings to obtain the necessary predicate orders as well as in the application to USCIS for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, Lawful Permanent Residence, and Employment Authorization Documents. She holds a case load commensurate with attorneys in the immigration unit!

Our Immigration Program has worked with 6 volunteer interpreters/ translators, who provided language translation for a total of 7 clients in French, Portuguese, Mandarin, and Haitian Creole. Additionally, this program has used a part-time inter who has researched issues for cases and has worked on immigration applications (under attorney supervision) for Employment Authorization Documents, Freedom of Information Act requests, and a Violence Against Women Act Self-Petition.

The Legal Project formed a partnership with Union College and the Department of Political Science Internship Program and have already hired two student interns to assist with the coordination of the Virtual Legal Clinic Program.

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Pro Bono Statistics

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attorneys:</td>
<td>257 Volunteers 1515 Hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Law Students:</td>
<td>3 Volunteers 200 Hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Volunteers:</td>
<td>11 Volunteers 290 Hours</td>
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Sources Of Funding

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<th>Source</th>
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<tr>
<td>IOLA Grant</td>
<td>$446,370</td>
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<td>Foundations</td>
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