Her Justice

Overview of Achievements, 2020-2021

Her Justice stands with women living in poverty throughout New York City by training and mentoring volunteer lawyers to represent them and address individual and systemic barriers. Working with pro bono attorneys from 90 law firms and corporations, Her Justice provides access to justice to low-income women in all five boroughs of New York City who would otherwise generally be unrepresented. Most Her Justice clients are survivors of domestic violence (80%) and mothers (70%).

During the grant period, our volunteers and staff provided legal assistance in 3,797[1] family, divorce and immigration matters, including direct representation in 389 closed matters, advice and counsel and brief services in 729 closed matters and 2,679 active and open matters. We also provided other information or legal assistance or referrals in 231 cases, to legal and social service providers.

IOLA funding enabled Her Justice to provide legal assistance in 1,118 closed cases that directly benefited 2,714 vulnerable women and children. For poor women, especially victims of domestic violence, the assistance of trained, competent legal counsel can make the difference between long-term stability and extreme poverty and homelessness. The women Her Justice serves attain freedom from abuse and the legal remedies they need to assert their independence from their abusers—custody of their children, child support, divorce judgments providing children with essential health insurance and women with fair financial awards, and immigration status enabling them to work legally and provide for their families. During the grant period, Her Justice clients obtained financial awards and settlements totaling $41,682 as well as monthly benefits totaling $7,910.

Her Justice exceeded the anticipated goals for the grant period for Volunteers enrolled and Community Legal Education. We did not achieve our anticipated annual goals for Individual Case Services—Cases Closed, People Benefitted, Pro Se Assistance, or Referrals. Cases are remaining open longer and fewer closed within the reporting period than anticipated. COVID 19 impacted many systems we work with and we experienced a decrease in individuals reaching out for services and a delay in processing of new and existing matters.

Population Served: Indigent and Working Poor Women

Area Served: New York City Metropolitan Area

Total Funding: $4,745,855

Total IOLA Grant: $245,000

Staffing - Full Time Equivalents:
- Total Staff: 33.50
- Lawyers: 13.20
- Paralegals: 6.80
- Other: 13.50
Over the course of her decades-long marriage, Anna* started and ran her own business, raised two sons, and purchased a multi-unit apartment building with her husband where the family lived. Unfortunately, the husband’s emotional and economic abuse wreaked havoc on the world Anna worked so hard to build by destroying her business, attempting to ruin her reputation in the community, pocketing the rent without paying the bills, and mismanaging the marital property into the ground. At one point, the husband insisted Anna put a car loan in her name, then took the new car keys without allowing her to touch them again until he abandoned the car some years later and she was forced to surrender it. When the husband filed for divorce, abandoned the case, and left the country, the burden of responsibility and debt fell onto Anna’s shoulders. Although she began to collect the rent and pay off as many bills as she could, there was hardly enough to keep the utilities on. Anna discovered that the city would imminently sell the property tax liens against the building which would ultimately lead to its foreclosure and sale at auction, robbing Anna of her only remaining asset.

Naomi, one of our own attorneys, stepped in to represent Anna in the divorce and filed an emergency motion ordering the husband to pay enough of the liens to save the building from foreclosure. Once the situation was stabilized and they were no longer in danger of losing the property, Naomi and the husband’s attorney worked together to ensure the property was put on the market and divided through a settlement – not an easy feat during a pandemic and in the context of continuing abuse. Not only did the parties ultimately sell their building, Anna left the settlement with over half a million dollars and Naomi secured an additional $100,000 for Anna to offset the financial abuse that had taken place during the marriage, helping Anna achieve economic autonomy and a just outcome.

Isabel,* a nurse and survivor of intimate partner violence, came to Her Justice in 2018 seeking child support from the father of her three children. Her case was placed with a volunteer attorney who successfully helped her obtain a child support order. This is when the real battle began. The father began harassing Isabel by filing repeated appeals in court, advocating for a downward modification of the child support he was ordered to pay. Isabel was forced to put her life on hold and appear in court time and time again. This is a common tactic used by abusers to exert power and control through the legal system. At one point, the father filed a new downward modification on the very same day that the previous one was denied. Isabel’s volunteer attorney stood by her side through it all. After two years of constant turmoil, she was finally granted a favorable decision when the court denied the father’s objections. This put a temporary end to the harassment and allowed Isabel to get back to living her life.
**Number of People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>People</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5,654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Legal Education</td>
<td>3,930</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pro Se Assistance</td>
<td>1,074</td>
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<tr>
<td>Online Assistance</td>
<td>650</td>
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**Other Legal Related Services: Overview**

Her Justice has identified areas to enhance the quality and scope of our services to better meet our clients’ needs. In an effort to increase access to services, we have significantly expanded its outreach to communities throughout the city to better reach clients who may not be aware of our services as well as increased the number of capacity-building trainings for small, community-based not-for-profit agencies that do not have lawyers on staff or do not have the capacity or expertise to provide the legal services their clients need. Her Justice also offers pro se litigants booklets with detailed information and instructions on how to navigate the legal system and Family and Supreme courts.

Her Justice has also expanded our services to clients in the area of consumer debt for clients seeking a divorce. Building upon our expertise in addressing financial issues in the course of a divorce, Her Justice is well positioned to be able to assist clients with consumer debt issues, more fully described, below.
**Other Legal Related Services: Examples**

**Efforts to Provide Access to Services**

As part of our strategy to ensure that low-income, underserved women in New York City receive accurate, reliable information about their legal rights and the remedies available to them, Her Justice strengthened relationships with community-based organizations, providing trainings on rights and options available to women living in poverty including:

Family & Matrimonial Law 101 at Latin Women in Action on October 22, 2020 for 10 staff members, via Zoom.

Immigration Remedies for Domestic Violence Survivors Webinar at Connect NYC on November 16, 2020 for 34 staff members, via Zoom.

Financial Abuse 101 presentation to 16 staff of the Urban Resource Institute on February 24, 2021.

**Basic Series Booklets**

Her Justice has also developed and published 11 easy-to-read booklets that comprise The Basics Series cover a wide array of family law topics and provide pro se litigants with detailed information and instructions on how to proceed on their own in Family and Supreme Court. These booklets are available in English and Spanish on our website and via links on the LawHelpNY.org and WomensLaw.org websites. During the grant period, the booklets were accessed on our website 650 times.

**Marital Debt Project**

In 2018, with the support of an Equal Justice Fellow, Her Justice launched the Marital Debt Project to help women obtain a divorce and have greater economic security. The project offers clients free legal representation in the divorce, financial advocacy and defense against creditors for divorcing clients. Divorces often leave women economically insecure, and responsible for debt. A major financial issue in a divorce may be splitting up “marital debts” between the two spouses. Generally, marital debts are debts acquired during the marriage. Abusive partners may trap the family in debt through financial abuse, including identity theft and forcing a partner to take out debt in their own name. Consumer debt can also stand in the way of financial stability for women living in poverty in New York City. The Project has since expanded to incorporate financial advocacy and screening for consumer debt and financial abuse throughout our legal services. Attorneys coordinate community outreach to enhance public education about divorce and child/spousal support, so that those engaging with the legal system are better informed and able to advocate for themselves. We have also offered Financial Disclosure Affidavit clinics to our partnering law firms which have enhanced the services we and our pro bono attorneys provide clients.
**Other Services**

**Significant Collaborations**

Her Justice partners with all five FJCs, where a staff attorney and paralegal conduct intake and provide a full range of information, advice and counsel, brief services and representation. The FJCs are a particularly effective way to connect with women who are in the greatest need of our services. Our in-person intakes at the FJCs enable us to quickly assess a client’s needs, gather necessary background documents and information and gauge her ability to cooperate with, and benefit from, pro bono representation. While the FJCs were physically closed for most of this past year, we continued to receive referrals for all our practice areas and conducted consultations over the phone and video conferencing. Her Justice works closely with the more than 20 other on-site and off-site social service and civil legal partners at each FJC to provide comprehensive service to FJC clients.

During the grant period, Her Justice increased the number and reach of know-your-rights legal presentations and clinics with community-based partners who do not have legal services on-site and who have informed Her Justice that its clients are not always comfortable going to the FJCs for legal services. Such discomfort stems from immigration concerns and the challenge of navigating such a large service Center. Her Justice partners with (1) Korean American Family Service Center (KAFSC), accepting referrals, providing KAFSC clients and staff with legal information and advice, and training KAFSC staff and intake volunteers to provide information to more members of their community and to conduct intake for matters to be referred to Her Justice, in a program focused on preventing and ending domestic violence and relationship abuse; (2) Sakhi for South Asian Women, accepting referrals and providing community education and outreach to South Asian women; (3) Violence Intervention Project (VIP) Mujeres that provides crisis counseling, advocacy and support for survivors of domestic and sexual violence; and (4) ConnectNYC, providing immigration trainings to Connect staff so that they may better serve their clients and provide appropriate referrals for services to Her Justice.
Trainings

During the grant period, Her Justice conducted 18 live Zoom CLE programs and trained 2,270 pro bono attorneys and non-attorneys (summer associates or paralegals). Multiple trainings were provided in each of the substantive areas of the law relevant to the matters we refer. In addition, Her Justice attorneys trained staff from community-based organizations and service providers on rights and options available to women living in poverty including:

- Family & Matrimonial Law 101 at Latin Women in Action on October 22, 2020 for 10 staff members, via Zoom.
- Immigration Remedies for Domestic Violence Survivors Webinar at Connect NYC on November 16, 2020 for 34 staff members, via Zoom.
- Financial Abuse presentation to 16 staff of the Urban Resource Institute on February 24, 2021.

Her Justice staff members regularly attend trainings to keep up-to-date with developments in various aspects of family, matrimonial and immigration law relevant to our work, including courses which provide Continuing Legal Education (CLE) credits such as the American Immigration Lawyers Association National Conference; MatLaw Ultimate Update; and the Fordham Consumer Debt Conference. In addition, Her Justice staff also attended many live trainings and webinars on other topics that hone our practice and managerial skills, including vicarious trauma; interpretation; technology; presentation and communication; and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI).

Her Justice provides an orientation and training to onboard new staff, volunteers as well as new board members to introduce them to our mission, staff, and programs. In addition, staff and volunteers are trained on our database system as well as in the substantive areas we practice- family, matrimonial and immigration.

Technology

Her Justice uses technology to enhance its outreach and the quality and delivery of legal services to clients, to recruit, train and mentor volunteers and to coordinate the operations of our six offices. The legal department is continually refining system configuration to improve workflow and data management effectiveness. LegalServer, a web-based application, enables staff to interview clients and provide legal services at sites convenient to clients and advocates. Clients regularly send us emails and photos of documents and we are using a Legal Server texting tool for clients to send us communications and documents in text messages which is often the easiest method for them. These features enhance our ability to work with clients and partners wherever we are needed and ensure business continuity. In addition, attorneys have access to legal resources and treatises from Lexis, as well as other publications to keep them well-informed of developments in the law. This past year, Her Justice provided every staff member business laptops for off-site access to the data base and to facilitate intakes and engage with clients, thereby enhancing access to justice. In addition to LegalServer, staff use Mitel telephone software, as well as a variety of applications, including Zoom, Slack, and the Microsoft Suite, including TEAMS.
Her Justice specializes in offering pro bono assistance—connecting volunteer lawyers from 90 firms with women living in poverty who desperately need a lawyer. For over 28 years, Her Justice has provided essential legal assistance to indigent women and children, as well as expert training and support for the attorneys who represent them. By engaging the talent and resources of private firms, Her Justice leverages its small legal staff and increases exponentially the number of women who go to court with their own lawyers and obtain the legal protections that they and their children need and deserve. Our 13 staff attorneys trained and mentored 373 pro bono lawyers, paralegals and law students working on 1,118 closed cases during the grant period and 2270 new volunteers were trained. Her Justice had a total of 3,155 enrolled volunteers during this reporting period, including attorneys working on both open and closed matters.

Her Justice conducts live trainings year-round—also available via video streaming—providing detailed manuals containing case law and sample documents. CLE credit is available for live and video trainings and pro bono hours worked on referred matters. Our trainings focus on the impact domestic violence has on the lives of survivors and the challenges faced by immigrants. Volunteer lawyers are assigned an experienced staff attorney mentor who is available to strategize, answer questions, review documents and provide referrals. Four firm attorneys work full-time as externs in our main office, providing immediate in-court representation in complex or emergency matters and receiving daily mentoring. Non-attorney volunteers translate or interpret for non-English-speaking clients. Volunteer forensic accountants and investigators compile and analyze the documentation necessary to obtain fair financial awards. Our Summer Associate Program gives summer associates at our Corporate Partners hands-on legal experience and helps to recruit future lawyers to represent low-income women. During summer 2020, 156 attorneys with 61 Summer Associates (law student) from 16 firms worked on 86 legal matters. this past year they worked with us remotely, supervised by staff attorneys.

Law student interns and paralegals volunteer throughout the year, usually in our main office, but this past year they worked with us remotely, supervised by staff attorneys.

### Pro Bono Statistics

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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attorneys</td>
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<td>48,301</td>
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<tr>
<td>Law Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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### Sources Of Funding

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<th>Source</th>
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<td>IOLA Grant</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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