Overview of Achievements, 2018-2019

VOLS’ mission is to leverage the goodwill, talents and resources of New York City’s leading law firms to provide pro bono legal assistance to low-income New Yorkers. To achieve this mission, from April 1, 2018 to March 31 2019, we: closed 1678 matters; provided services benefiting 2,929 low-income New Yorkers; won $116,150 in unemployment and other benefits; engaged 1095 volunteers; and secured 24,101 hours of pro bono legal assistance. We provided this legal assistance through the following projects: the VOLS Children’s Project, Incarcerated Mothers Law Project, Elderly Project, Immigration Project, Unemployment Project, and Microenterprise Project. Key achievements include:

The Elderly Project increased its capacity to provide legal services to low income seniors by hiring its first Staff Attorney to work alongside the Project Director. The Project has increased service to particularly vulnerable groups of seniors including veterans, immigrants and LGBTQ+ clients. The Project was invited to present at conferences and industry trainings on legal issues facing low income older veterans including issues related to access to benefits from the Veterans Administration and housing discrimination. The Project has also explored new approaches to furthering its goal of helping seniors stay in their home and in the community, including filing a winning a lawsuit on behalf of a client facing landlord harassment.

The Incarcerated Mothers Law Project conducted monthly legal clinics with pro bono attorneys who visited Rikers and Taconic correctional facilities to advise women on family law issues, including how to preserve and protect their parental rights. The Project participated in the May 2018 family resource fair at the Rose M. Singer Center organized by First Lady Chirlane McCray, and the NYC Children’s Cabinet.

The Immigration Project launched a new medical-legal partnership with the Community Healthcare Network (CHN), initially as a pilot to serve community members in Crown Heights, and later expanding to provide services in six high schools through school-based health centers in Washington Heights and the Lower East Side.

The Microenterprise Project continued its Advocacy for Commercial Tenants (ACT) initiative for the second year. The cornerstone of that initiative is the Commercial Lease Assistance Program (“CLA Program”), funded by the City of New York, with VOLS staff attorneys and pro bono volunteers providing legal assistance to low-income small business owners. A significant focus of this program is to combat landlord harassment and displacement of small business owners. The Microenterprise Project also diversified its educational workshops, providing free legal workshops on intellectual property, investment, joint bidding, and import/export in addition to existing programs covering entity selection and formation, commercial leasing, and an overview of legal issues for small businesses.

Population Served: General Low Income Population

Area Served: New York City Metropolitan Area

Total Funding: $1,735,707

Total IOLA Grant: $275,000

Staffing - Full Time Equivalents:
- Total Staff: 13.50
- Lawyers: 8.80
- Paralegals: 2.10
- Other: 2.60
Last year, the Elderly Project prepared a Durable Power of Attorney for a 92-year-old client who appointed her daughter as agent when it became clear that her dementia was progressing. After a recent hospitalization, her daughter discovered that her mother was on the verge of eviction because her mother had failed to complete a Section 8 housing subsidy recertification, clearly due to her reduced cognition. Using the Power of Attorney, VOLS and her daughter requested a reasonable accommodation under various federal and local statutes. Without the authority granted to her by the Power of Attorney, the daughter would not have had legal standing to request the accommodation. The subsidy was restored, and the client had a home to return to thanks to the advanced planning provided by the Elderly Project. This case is a perfect example of how the Elderly Project’s work in helping seniors plan for the future empowers loved ones to allow seniors to remain in their home and in the community.

Angie came to VOLS years ago to seek help filing for DACA, a temporary form of relief from removal. She had dropped out of school to work and help support her family and did not have very good documentation to prove she had been continuously residing in the country for the previous five years, although she had been living in the United States since she was a young child. We screen all potential clients for all forms of immigration relief, and discovered that Angie was actually eligible for something better than DACA: a permanent pathway to security in this country. Angie was undergoing hormone therapy and expressed her fear of returning to Mexico as a transgender woman and could apply for asylum.

The biggest legal challenge for Angie was proving that she filed her application within a reasonable time after starting to transition from male to female. The government presumed this was not the case. The VOLS team worked with volunteer law students and lawyers and consulted with other non-profits and health care providers to ensure that Angie proved her claim. Due to the backlog at the Department of Homeland Security, it was several years before Angie had the opportunity to have her case adjudicated. In the intervening years, we made sure that Angie was renewing her employment authorization each year, and preparing for her hearing. Angie was granted asylum and is now on the path to citizenship. She is also giving back to her community as a health care advocate for others with a local non-profit serving the trans-latix community.
Volunteers of Legal Services

Number of People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Number of People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17,020 people</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Legal Education</td>
<td>6,103 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Outreach</td>
<td>10,917 people</td>
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**Other Legal Related Services: Overview**

Community legal education is an essential part of VOLS' model of forging relationships between networks of community organizations, public interest law experts, and pro bono lawyers. In 2017-18, we conducted trainings and workshops that reached a total of 2,238 people. In 2018-19, we conducted trainings and workshops that reached a total of 4,122 people, almost double of our reach in the prior year. We conducted sessions at hospitals, schools, jails, prisons, senior centers, and community economic development agencies, on topics including immigration, housing, family law, elder law, and business law.

We make our services accessible by partnering with community organizations and institutions that are accessible to our clients and where they already receive a range of other services. For example, in our Elderly project, we conduct 9 monthly walk-in legal clinics at senior centers and other places where seniors attend lunch programs, recreational activities and seek social service assistance. We also conduct home visits for homebound clients. On February 26, 2019, Elderly Project Director Peter Kempner, conducted an online training for Selfhelp’s “Virtual Senior Center” program where homebound Older Adults attend live virtual classes on a wide variety of topics from their homes. In our School- and Hospital-based Children's Projects, we conduct legal clinics and legal trainings at schools and hospitals, where our clients attend school or receive medical services. In our Incarcerated Mothers Law Project, we conduct 24 monthly intake and sessions inside a jail and a state prison. In our Microenterprise Project we started a monthly business clinic in the Bronx in which business owners have the option to meet with attorneys at the community-based partner’s office, at their own place of business, or by video conference; allowing the client to choose whichever is easiest for them. The Immigration Project has worked with new community-based organizations and school partners to reach individuals seeking legal guidance in underserved communities, by conducting Know-Your-Rights workshops and legal screenings in locations that feel familiar and safe in order to mitigate some of the fear instilled by the current enforcement actions against immigrants.
Impact Cases

The Elderly Project filed a lawsuit (Cabrera v. New Cathedral Parkway LLC, Index # 152101/19) in the New York County Supreme court, along with co-counsel Alston & Bird, alleging that the landlord of a 64-year old veteran who had lived in the same rent-controlled apartment in Manhattan since 1963, when he was a child and living with his parents and brother. After the passing of his parents and brother, Mr. Cabrera’s rent subsumed nearly all of his income from his VA service-connected disability benefits and his pension from his time working for the United States Post Office. He sought to apply for the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) benefit but needed his landlord’s cooperation with the process. Instead of helping their tenant of over 53 years apply for the benefit, the landlord put up roadblocks to the process and eventually our client’s application for SCRIE benefits was denied because of the landlord’s actions. After coming to one of the Elderly Project’s legal clinics at the Goddard-Riverside Senior Center, VOLS and our co-counsel sent a letter to the landlord demanding their cooperation. Instead of cooperating, the landlord threatened to increase Mr. Cabrera’s rent by nearly $1000 per month. This lawsuit alleges that the landlord has violated the prohibition on source of income discrimination in housing under the New York City Human Rights Law, that the landlord has engaged in a pattern of tenant harassment and is seeking to charge a rent in excess of the legal limited allowed under the New York State Rent Control program. A favorable ruling will establish that non-cooperation with a tenant’s application for rental assistance constitutes source of income under the statute and can serve as a model for other senior tenant who face similar obstacles in obtaining SCRIE or other housing programs.

Other Legal Related Services—Examples

- Over the past year the Elderly Project has conducted over 35 trainings for attorneys, the staff of community-based organizations and for seniors in the community. This includes trainings given to volunteer attorneys on the “Preparation and Execution of Life Planning Documents for Individuals of Limited Means”, trainings for community-based partners and consumers on the importance of end of life planning as well as other topics. On June 12, 2018, Elderly Project Director, Peter Kempner presented for the New York State Bar Association at their “How to Serve Veterans in Your Law Practice” CLE program. Mr. Kempner’s presentation focused on access to and eligibility for VA Pension benefits for low income elderly and disabled veterans. On August 30, 2018, and again on March 14, 2019, Mr. Kempner presented at Veterans Human Rights Conferences convened by the New York State Division of Veterans Services on combating discrimination that New York veterans facing in securing safe and affordable housing.

- On November 28, 2018, VOLS’ Microenterprise Project presented a legal workshop with one of the Project’s community partners, Haitian American Caucus. A team of two volunteers attorneys, a legal intern from CUNY Law School, and the Microenterprise Project Director, created a new curriculum for the workshop. The workshop, presented by the VOLS legal intern and a volunteer attorney, covered the value of protecting intellectual property and the various ways of doing so. Forty-five people attended the event in Flatbush, Brooklyn.
**Significant Collaborations**

VOLS is a founding member of the New York Legal Services Coalition, through which we collaborate with 47 other legal services organizations to bring legal assistance to low-income New Yorkers. We are also a founding member of the LawHelp Consortium, and we are now a member of Pro Bono Net’s LawHelp Advisory Group. VOLS is a member of LEAP, and two staff members serve on PIPBA (the Public Interest Pro Bono Association). Each of our projects also engages in significant collaborations described below. Our Executive Director is Special Advisor to the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice.

VOLS leverages the resources of over 60 law firms, companies and others to provide pro bono representation, and over 200 community organizations, schools, and hospitals who help us identify clients, and work with us to provide holistic services. Our participating firms include most of the major New York-based law firms, and smaller specialty firms. We also partner on projects with New York area law schools. Our community organizations (listed by project) include:

**Elderly Project, Monthly Walk-In Legal Clinics:** Hamilton-Madison House/City Hall Senior Center, University Settlement Center, The Carter Burden Center for the Aging, Covello Senior Program, Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center, Hudson Guild Senior Services, Encore Community Senior Center, Goddard-Riverside Senior Center, Riverstone Senior Life Services. The Elderly Project also receives referrals from, conducts trainings at, and provides information and updates to social workers at 90 other agencies.

**Hospital-based Children’s Project:** The following health providers and matched law firms participate in our Hospital-based Children's Project: The Children’s Hospital at Montefiore (Cravath, Swaine & Moore); A.I.R.NYC (Sullivan & Cromwell); Morgan Stanley Children’s Hospital of New York-Presbyterian (Cravath)

**School-based Children’s Project:** Essex Street Academy (Hughes Hubbard); Dream Charter School (Skadden Arps); KIPP Academy (Debevoise & Plimpton); PS/MS 188 (Kramer Levin)

**Immigration Project, Collaboration and Referral Partners:** Atlas DIY; CALA; Community Health Network (CHN); Create Young Adult Center; Cypress Hills Development Corp; Her Justice; Henry Street Settlement; Immigration Arc; Immigration Equality; Legal Aid Society; Make the Road NY; Mixteca; NY Immigration Coalition; New Economy Project; The Door; Turning Point Brooklyn; Urban Justice Center – Peter Ciccione; Youth Project; Youth Represent.

**Partner Schools and Referring Schools:** Academy for Environmental Leadership; Academy of Government and Law; Academy of Innovative Technology; Academy of Urban Planning; Bronx Bridges; Bronx Community College; Brooklyn Lab; Bushwick School for Social Justice; Community School for Social Justice; Cypress Hills Collegiate; Essex Street Academy; HERO High; Kipp Elementary; Kipp Infinity; Mott Hall Bronx High School; Multicultural High School; The Kurt Hahn Expeditionary Learning School; Urban Assembly (UA) Institute of Math & Science for Young Women; UA School for Applied Math and Science; UA School for Criminal Justice; UA School for Global Commerce; UA School for Government & Law; UA School for Green Careers; UA School for Law & Justice; UA School for Wildlife Conservation; UA School of Business for Young Women; UA School of Design & Construction; Washington Irving High School.

**Incarcerated Mothers Law Project:** Columbia University School of Law; Federal Bureau of Prisons; Hour Children; NYC Department of Correction; NY Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents; NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision; Osborne Association; Women’s Prison Association.

**Microenterprise Project:** Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation; Brooklyn SBDC; CAMBA; Evergreen; Flatbush Development Corporation; IMPACCT; LDC of East New York; Make the Road New York; Bronx SBDC; Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition; Pan-African Community Development Initiative; SoBRO; WHEDco; African Communities Together; Business Center for New Americans; Harlem-Columbia SBDC; Cooper Square Committee; Manhattan SBDC; Midtown Manhattan SBDC; NYC Business Solutions – Upper Manhattan Project Enterprise; TruFund Financial Services; Washington Heights and Inwood Development Corporation; Chinatown Manpower Project; Excelsior Growth Fund; Hebrew Free Loan Society; NYC Business – Main Office.

**Unemployment Insurance Advocacy Project:** We work closely with the New York State Unemployment Insurance Appeal Board, the New York State Department of Labor, the Unemployment Insurance Coalition, the Low Wage Workers Task Force, and the JCC-Brooklyn.
**Dollar Benefits Achieved for Clients**

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**Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement**

VOLS was created 35 years ago by the New York City Bar Association in collaboration with the major NYC law firms and companies, specifically for the purpose of leveraging pro bono services to help low-income New Yorkers. That mission is at our core, and each of our projects is dedicated to recruiting, training and mobilizing pro bono attorneys to work with our staff to close the justice gap. We do this by making presentations at law firms to educate them about our pro bono opportunities, by conducting clinics at community organizations in collaborations with these partners and by mentoring on individual matters.

We engage law students in our work through internships, and pro bono scholarship. For example, in Fall 2018, the Microenterprise Project hosted a legal intern from City University of New York’s Law School as part of her participation in the Community Economic Development Clinic. The student’s interest in intellectual property (IP) law and high demand from the Project’s clients for IP assistance presented an opportunity for VOLS to increase capacity. VOLS recruited the law firm of Katten Muchin & Rosenman LLP to provide mentorship to the law student as she development a new IP workshop curriculum, represented clients on their trademark applications, and revised the Project’s client intake checklist to better identify small businesses that would benefit from IP assistance. During the semester the law student worked closely with two pro bono volunteers from Katten, an independent volunteer who formerly worked in-house at a large fashion company, and a solo practitioner focused on IP law. The partnership was a success and VOLS has increased its expertise and capacity to assist under-resourced business owners with this important need.

**Pro Bono Statistics**

Attorneys: 942 Volunteers 21,976 Hours

Law Students: 20 Volunteers 916 Hours

Other Volunteers: 133 Volunteers 1,095 Hours

**Sources Of Funding**

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