Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York
2021-2022

Overview of Achievements

The Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York (LASNNY) relied on its generous IOLA grant to respond aggressively and comprehensively to the ongoing impact of COVID-19 and to provide life-changing legal assistance to low-income people throughout its 16-county service area. IOLA funds supported about 11% of our operating expenses. Our staff and volunteers closed 7,896 cases benefitting 16,332 individuals and had 4,678 pending at the end of the fiscal year. Throughout the pandemic, our management reviewed the pace of new calls and intakes. Overall, during the fiscal year, LASNNY calls increased 20% and intakes increased 16% from 2020-21 but incoming calls were still 12.4% lower than 2019-20. LASNNY staff screened 126,192 callers, handled 12,573 cases, and provided legal representation, information, referrals, community legal education and other outreach that benefitted more than 73,618 low-income individuals. www.lasnny.org had 192,926 unique views. LASNNY staff continued to use innovative outreach in this largely virtual world; as courts opened up more, we responded in person or virtually. Housing intakes exceeded all others in this fiscal year making up 39.7% of all new cases. We received significant new housing funding, $3.2M annually, through ERAP and HUD’s Eviction Protection Program. We continued to support legal and social services colleagues locally, statewide, and nationally.

Our offices remained closed to walk-in traffic though clients who came to the door used the phone or intercom to talk with us, or came in by appointment to meet with attorneys or do virtual hearings. Our regional coordinated intake program served all four offices, allowing shifts in staffing to be better absorbed across four offices. Like so many others, we are struggling with retention, turnover, and hiring challenges. We dramatically increased salaries of Union staff in November 2021 and are beginning to see some results. We continued to follow through on our 2018 Strategic Plan, hiring a consultant to work with our Board’s Search Committee in the search for our next Executive Director. We made great strides in our race equity priority, hiring a Chief Diversity Officer/Race Equity Director and continuing our race equity work both internally and in our advocacy. We honored both our impact and race equity commitments by developing race equity choice points to guide our case acceptance.

Service Area:
Northeastern Region of New York State

Population Served: General Low Income Population

Area Served: Northeastern Region of New York State

Total IOLA Grant: $1,202,739

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:
- Total Staff: 106
- Lawyers: 60.8
- Paralegals: 18
- Other: 27.2
Direct Legal Services: Cases

Employment:
Our client, “Rose,” was applying for a NYS real estate broker license. Rose had a 2010 felony drug conviction and her LASNNY attorney assisted her in submitting a motion to seal under CPL 160.59 which was granted. Her LASNNY lawyer hand-delivered documentation including letters of support and Rose’s academic achievements to the Department of State - Licensing Division. They issued her a real estate license this year, and she has been hired by a real estate firm in the Capital Region.

Taxes:
“Lillian,” a low-income non-dominant language user taxpayer was assessed a tax debt resulting from joint tax returns filed several years before by her estranged husband who had failed to pay taxes due on his business income. During the marriage, he had exerted total control of the household finances in addition to abusing the client physically and mentally. Lillian was in fear of her husband and had no access to the family’s financial information including anything concerning the tax liability. Her husband was deported after being arrested and imprisoned for committing domestic violence against Lillian and her minor children. The IRS was seeking payment of more than $10,000 from Lillian. We filed a request for innocent spouse relief for Lillian and then appealed when the initial request was denied. Ultimately, the appeal was successful, relieving Lillian of the responsibility of paying her husband’s debt.
LASNNY also continued to provide other legal-related services to our target population of low income people including referrals, pro se assistance, community legal education and outreach in order to supplement our program of direct legal services and to provide the client community with preventative legal education so that they might make better decisions in the future. We kept our community partners informed about our work, about changes related to COVID-19, the end of the eviction moratorium, and our clients’ rights. As the end of the moratorium approached, we provided training to our staff and community partners including local Continuums of Care, elected officials and other agency representatives. During the 12-month reporting period, an estimated 3,708 referrals to non-legal providers and other legal services providers, including public defenders and local courts, were made by support staff. We continued to update our legal library content including updates necessitated by changes in the COVID-19 housing laws. Our goal remains to efficiently provide as much information and education as possible to our client community and to agencies which serve them. We believe that preventative legal education and information will help low income people make better decisions in the future. All our case handlers referred clients to social and other legal services providers. Many of our individual cases involved helping clients to prepare to proceed pro se.

LASNNY also continued to operate a substantial program of training, outreach and education virtually. We regularly publicize our own services, including our telephone intake system and various special projects. We also provide extensive outreach about SNAP benefits in six counties. During the reporting period an estimated 53,578 people attended community group or 9 CLE presentations, received legal education, and self-help materials. We also sent 174,046 informational emails using Constant Contact. We had 47,425 unique views of our online Legal Lifeline brochures and Coronavirus legal education and 192,926 unique views of our website.

### Other Services: Overview

| Number of People who Benefitted from Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Community Legal Education                     | 180,153           |
| Online Assistance                              | 47,425            |

227,578 People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation
Other Services: Technology and Other Innovations

In 2021-2022, LASNNY continued to contract with Just Tech to provide Chief Information Officer services, and ABS Solutions to provide Help Desk assistance. LASNNY’s Executive Director serves on the New York State Technology Group. LASNNY continues to operate a virtual private network among five offices. The Albany office functions as a primary datacenter providing secure remote access to remote users. Data and applications are replicated to an offsite data backup location. We brought all regional offices to the toll free, regional Covid-19 Legal Line number and are moving away from our old toll-free numbers. We quietly expanded online intake to all the regional offices. We continue to use tools like Microsoft Teams for both Court and much of our internal remote/video communication. Our Tech Talks help staff utilize available technology and maximize SharePoint usage. We use Zoom and GoToMeeting as well. We regularly update our website (www.lasnny.org), our Facebook page (http://www.facebook.com/#!/LASNNY) and our Instagram. We use CTG to assist rural clients via video chat and LHI interviews to generate pro se pleadings. We continue to ease remote work through laptops for staff to allow us to work more efficiently whether in the office, fully remote or hybrid.

Other Services: Trainings

During the IOLA grant year, we provided orientation to 2 new Board members and new employee orientation to 20 new employees (11 attorneys, 3 paralegals, 1 PAI Coordinator, and 5 support staff). We continued our improved new employee orientation with a full hour of cultural humility training, almost an hour of domestic violence training, as well as an upgraded LSC Rules & Regulation training. We trained 120 PAI attorneys and staff on subjects including pandemic-related unemployment insurance benefits, bankruptcy, malpractice avoidance, implicit bias, landlord/tenant law during COVID-19, and two for unemployment insurance benefits. 124 staff attended training within New York or nationally, all of it virtual. Through PLI, NYSBA, and the ABA, we were able to offer substantial training to attorneys. We also offered white privilege training to the entire staff.

In this grant year we also continued a new training series for Board members. In addition to the usual two-hour orientation, Board members can attend or watch at a later date, training modules on Board decision-making, communication between attorneys and client Board members, history, fiscal, development and cultural humility. We added two new trainings on “What We Do” and presented to the Board on our work including our new Kaianerhensera Aorhiwâke Shakotihshienons (KAS) Project on the St. Regis Mohawk Reservation. LASNNY staff also participated in trainings offered by the NYS Tech Group and the ITC.
Impact Cases

**Brown v. City of Schenectady et al:**
Code Enforcement ordered our client to vacate her home with no hearing. Upon our application, Supreme Court found that the statute was unconstitutional. The city appealed but did not request a stay pending appeal. We then found out that Code Enforcement continued to order local residents to vacate with no hearings and filed a contempt proceeding. We settled that proceeding, and the city changed its law. This affects approximately 91,000 people.

**Ridge v. Kijakizi:**
The Social Security Administration denied our client’s application for disability benefits, based on its decision that she could work, and we filed this federal court action. Social Security remanded the case for a new hearing, because they agreed that the judge had no proof that the client would be able to successfully complete probation at any job. We believe this is a novel decision in this court which affects about 26,711 people.

**Department of Social Services problems:**
Local DSS was only giving TA applicants the legally mandated application if they filled out and passed a “pre-application.” Because of this, several applicants were denied their due process rights. We advocated with DSS, which promised that this practice would cease. This affects approximately 921 people.

Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

The Legal Aid Society operates a vibrant pro bono referral program, our Private Attorney Involvement (PAI) Program. We generally recruit our volunteers at meetings, trainings, and other professional events, and in the last year trained and recruited 120 attorneys through our virtual trainings. PAI opened 381 new cases and closed 490 cases. Our volunteers continue to expand available services by taking on a broad range of civil cases: bankruptcies, wills, certain divorces, real estate matters, name changes, and tax issues. Our volunteers continued to run pro se divorce clinics virtually and staff Attorney-for-the-Day programs as the city courts of Albany and Troy reopened. We continue to support our volunteers in a variety of ways and they provided at least 920 hours of service. They are joined by LASNNY’s part-time, pro bono General Counsel who provided about 500 hours of pro bono service and our pro bono lobbyists who volunteered 113.21 hours. We recruited and trained 18 law students who volunteered 3,798 hours.
Significant Collaborations

LASNNY continued to anchor many of the services low-income clients with civil legal problems need. We shaped collaborations and projects designed to improve substantive services to clients, coordinate pro bono and pro se services, avoid duplication of effort, affirmatively improve the delivery of legal services whether in person, remote or hybrid, and continue to respond to the long-term impacts of COVID-19. Some of our most significant collaborations continue to be our housing services with funding for evictions, income maintenance and reentry services. With EESG-CV funding, we budgeted for more case management and direct legal assistance. Staffing challenges kept us from hiring for all positions we had and we will work with our partners to get available funds out as financial assistance. We partnered with the Center for Community Justice (CCJ) to launch a virtual LegalHand project to serve Albany and Schenectady counties. We collaborated with our partners and other providers to fight for restoration of OVS funding when it was cut. We hold legal clinics for In Our Own Voices, a culturally specific, LGBT GNC people of color organization and continue to collaborate closely with the Albany Law School and the Damien Center, in serving those with HIV AIDS. We also continued our medical-legal partnership (MLP) between St. Peters Health Partners and LASNNY.

Our senior legal services programs serve 8 counties and the St. Regis Mohawk reservation. Our Enhanced Multi-Disciplinary Team (E-MDT) serves 7 counties in the Mohawk Region and five Capital District counties to provide coordinated legal, social, and medical services to victims of elder abuse. Our Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP) maintained collaborations with social services and government agencies, health care navigators, local school districts, food pantries and others serving those facing food insecurity. Our foreclosure prevention project continued to serve homeowners facing foreclosure, 13 collaborating with housing counselors and others in serving clients and on funding. Our Low Income Taxpayer Clinic (LITC) lawyers participate in the New York-area LITC practitioner group. Working with our upstate legislators and legal services colleagues, we obtained new state funding designated for upstate direct legal services providers, and $25M in ERAP funding for all ROS LSC-funded providers. LASNNY’s collaborations on statewide and national legal service initiatives included remote delivery of legal and supportive services. The Executive Director joined the ABA Commission On Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Profession and led a workgroup drafting revisions to select ABA Standards for Civil Legal Aid Organizations. She is the Co-Chair of NYSBA’s Task Force on Racism, Social Equity and the Law and serves on the Third Judicial District’s Equal Justice Committee. These collaborations allow LASNNY to amplify our services to clients and contributions to the legal community.
Sources of Funding

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<td>City and County Funding</td>
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