The Rural Law Center provided individual case services that benefited 4,082 low income rural New Yorkers who represent our primary target population, a 28% increase in people benefited from the prior reporting year. This increase included clients with matters that developed as the eviction moratorium ended and courts reopened. We had an increase in clients needing assistance with housing, consumer debt and employment matters. Our total services resulted in approximately $790,125 in dollar benefits to our clients through lump sum awards and settlements, as well as $806,920 in dollar savings to clients.

We were also successful in launching a new website with significant improvements over our existing site. We prioritized mobile optimization realizing how crucial it was to have a mobile version of our website. Since our website went live in July 2021, 35% of our total website traffic was initiated from mobile devices. In compiling the content for our new website, we updated thirty-one of our informational articles and forms in our online resource library. Our overall website traffic has increased by 58% since the last reporting year.

This past year also saw our transition to a new case management system. We now utilize Legal Server for our case management needs. After several months of customizing, training, and learning our new case management system, we finalized our transition in September 2021. We have improved our ability to accurately and timely record information necessary for the effective management of cases. Our reporting capability has increased substantially, which allows us to have more control and planning for our goals and service needs.

The improvement of our website and case management system also allowed us to transition to an online intake format. Our online intakes increased to over 1000 for this past year. We continued to maintain our Covid-19 Hotline and promoted it through our social media and website to ensure that clients knew we were available to assist them with the many Covid-related issues they faced. As a result, 532 individuals benefited by utilizing our hotline, an increase of 58% from the previous reporting year.

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**Overview of Achievements**

**Population Served:** General Low Income Populations

**Area Served:** Rural Communities Statewide

**Total IOLA Grant:** $179,500

**Staffing Full Time Equivalents:**
- Total Staff: 14.48
- Lawyers: 5
- Paralegals: 3.73
- Other: 5.75
Direct Legal Services: Cases

Housing:
A client’s life estate was endangered by his late brother’s debt with federal and state taxing authorities. The client had a written agreement with his brother in which the brother agreed to pay all taxes associated with the property during the client’s lifetime in exchange for transferring the property to the brother and the client retaining a life estate. The property had been the client’s only home. This unusual agreement survived the brother’s death however, unknown to the client, the deceased had over $100,000.00 in tax liens against all of his real properties. The estate administration was extremely complicated.

Our attorney made numerous court appearances during the estate administration to advocate on behalf of the client and to protect his interest. The attorney also conferred with the multiple attorneys from differing state agencies and estate debtors and participated in the estate accounting, noting various issues with assets and debts.

Ultimately, while all other real property was lost, the client’s property was transferred back to him, thus assuring our client would be allowed to remain in his home for as long as he wishes.
Direct Legal Services: Cases

Family and Adoption:
Our client came to us seeking to adopt two siblings in her care for the last 8 years. Child Protective Services were involved and a petition for neglect had been filed for one of the children. Both children were subject to pre-natal use of drugs and alcohol by their developmentally disabled biological mother and general neglect by their biological fathers. Article 6 custody orders covered each child with their biological mother and respective biological fathers. While the biological mother consented to the adoption, our office had to track down the biological fathers to pursue adoption. Neither had provided consistent financial support, visited the children, or contacted our client to get updates about the children.

We represented our client in both adoptions. The biological father in one matter opposed the adoption necessitating several appearances and a hearing. Ultimately, he consented at the last minute, and both adoptions were finalized. This allowed the siblings to continue to live with the only parent they had ever known and two additional siblings. Finalizing the adoptions gave them the security of knowing they would always remain in their home.

Other Services: Overview
RLC has provided support with other legal related services through our customized initiatives. We provided legal related support to older adults and veterans. Our goal is to educate about housing, health care proxies, wills and family issues. Strategies include hosting workshops (including virtual), establishing a referral system with rural Offices for the Aging, and providing legal information on the importance of estate planning and elder law. The total number of people served in this reporting period is 747.

RLC also has a rural housing initiative. Our target population is rural, low-income tenants, homeowners (including mobile homes), and farm producers. Strategies in this program include providing legal information on home ownership, land contracts, mobile home law and landlord-tenant matters, and assisting agricultural producers facing debt and foreclosure on family farms. The total number of people served in this period is 680.
Other Services: Overview

We also have a kinship outreach program. The target population includes grandparents or relatives seeking custody in family court preventing foster care placements. Our goal is to increase knowledge and access to the complex process in rural county family courts. Strategies include direct legal assistance for non-parents seeking custody, publishing and distributing material specific to this unique custody process, and providing workshops for child protective caseworkers, child care advocates, and potential kinship and/or foster care providers. The total number of people served in this reporting period is 759.

RLC has a long standing mediation program. Our target population includes individuals, schools, community organizations, probation, and businesses who can employ these techniques in their individual settings. Beyond individual casework, our three county mediation program conducts significant outreach and community training. We continue to recruit and train new volunteers, who then go through our apprenticeship program. This reporting period, we have provided in person services in court and with individuals, along with virtual services. Our goal is to continue to provide knowledge about alternate methods to resolve disputes, which in turn alleviates strain on the court system. Strategies include offering workshops to community groups, schools and human service agencies introducing the basic theory and skills for ADR. The total number of people served in this reporting period is 910.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of People who Benefitted from Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Legal Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro Se Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Assistance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

29,639 People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation
Other Services: Technology and Other Innovations

We worked to change our data management system over this past fiscal year. Specifically, we reviewed information from various providers and other legal service organizations, and chose Legal Server. We received extensive training and conducted onboarding throughout the early part of the fiscal year and through the fall. We then began full utilization of Legal Server. It has proven to be a more efficient program than our prior system, and is a complete change from having no management system just five years ago. This is a significant improvement for us.

We also overhauled our website, updating our content and providing an online intake delivery system which loads directly to Legal Server. We implemented the use of software to better track our internet traffic in order for us to better serve our vast geographical area. We are now able to utilize Legal Server to identify where we have lower numbers of outreach, and then utilize the software on the website to determine the sources of incoming cases. We then target our less-reached communities through Facebook allowing us to increase our presence in needed areas.

Other Services: Trainings

We consider staff development and training a priority. All staff are required to participate in a variety of educational experiences, including improving technology skills and diversity training. Some examples of this year’s trainings:

- **NYCON Conferences** are held annually and are mandatory for Fiscal Director, Program Director and Executive Director to attend. Subject matters covered are Nonprofit Accounting; Accountability and Compliance; Fundraising and Communications and Nonprofit Governance.
- **Financial management and updated Accounting for Not for Profits** is required for our Fiscal Director and Executive Director.
- **Statewide Civil Legal Aid Technology Conferences** are mandatory for Fiscal Director, Program Director and Executive Director. This program has been in person and web based. This year Board Members attended this conference as well.
- **Equal Justice Conference** is voluntary for Executive Director and Program Director.
- **Basic Training Mediation** is available for our new mediation volunteers, an apprenticeship period, as well as receiving a mandatory 6 hours each year of continuing education in the field.
- **Legal Server** training was mandatory for all attorneys and staff to ensure efficiency of our new caseload management system.
- **Sexual Harassment training** is mandatory annually for all attorneys, staff and board members.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

Law Student Pro Bono Workshops: During this reporting year, we partnered with Albany Law School students participating in the Elder Law Pro Bono Program. In our fifteenth year of this program, we worked in partnership with 11 law students. This reporting period, we were a co-host to Albany Law School’s annual Veteran’s Law Day and Elder Law Community Training events. As part of this program, our attorneys provided free consultations virtually which reached a total of 18 clients.

Attorney Pro Bono Panel: Each year, we recruit attorneys in various geographic locations to provide pro bono services in a variety of legal matters. The attorneys have the option as to the type of matters and number of cases they would like to handle. We also call attorneys directly and make other personal contacts in high need areas to grow our list of attorneys willing to take pro bono cases. During the reporting period, we were able to add 11 new attorney volunteers to our roster.

Attorney Emeritus: RLC is a host organization for the New York State Unified Court System’s Attorney Emeritus program volunteers. We offered training opportunities to attorneys involved in our program as they arose, and encouraged our volunteers to take part. We have also been able to ascertain what areas our volunteers would like additional training in, and provide that training as it became available. Lastly, due to her unwavering commitment, an Attorney Emeritus working with RLC was awarded the President’s award for the Senior Attorney category from the New York State Bar Association. This reporting period 37 clients received legal services through this program.

22 Attorneys volunteered 56 hours

11 Law Students volunteered 10 hours
Significant Collaborations

**Regional Legal Services Programs:** Approximately 20% of our client intakes come directly from the intake staff of regional upstate legal service offices. These programs refer clients to us when they are unable to provide services but their intake staff has determined there may be a need for services. In turn, if we receive an intake, and we know a legal service organization deals with a specific substantive legal issue, we will make a referral directly to the organization.

**Law Reach: Rural Constituent Legal Services:** For over 13 years, RLC has worked with rural state legislators, offering legal services to their low income constituents who have not been able to access services from the local legal services provider. We offer a consultation, and where there are important legal issues at stake, we either represent the client, or make a pro bono referral. We work with the legislative staff to address their problem, and the combination of our legal help and their political power can make a real difference in a positive outcome for the client. This project also allows us to keep legislators informed about legal issues affecting their constituents. In 2021-22 we provided legal services to 9 individuals by referrals from 5 rural legislative offices.

**LIFT (Legal Information for Families Today):** RLC continues to work with LIFT as individuals are teamed up with attorneys who prepare individuals on presenting their case to the judge, explaining court documents, court orders and to provide referrals to other valuable resources in their community. RLC routinely provides referrals to LIFT for parents, grandparents and other suitable relatives who have no right to assigned counsel in their Family Court matter. LIFT assists the individuals through the confusing family court process. In 2021-22, 26 families were provided services through our collaboration with LIFT.

**Town and Village Courts:** We are available to provide on-site mediation services for 38 town and village courts in the Third Department. In addition to these courts, there are also small city courts wherein local judges refer cases to us to help low income litigants participate in dispute resolution for their legal issues dealing with consumer debt, evictions and family related issues. Civil small claims cases mediated in town and village or small city courts this reporting period is 176.
## Sources of Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IOLA Grant</td>
<td>$179,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City and County Funding</td>
<td>$171,712</td>
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<tr>
<td>State Funding</td>
<td>$693,360</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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| Total                      | $1,161,820|