Overview of Achievements

The Pro Bono Net programs funded through IOLA leverage technology to ensure access to a full continuum of legal options for low income and vulnerable individuals in New York State, ranging from early intervention tools and self-advocacy resources to limited scope pro bono and full representation. The existence and maturity of these programs played an essential role in ensuring access to justice and legal services during the continued Covid-19 pandemic in the past year, its profound disruption of in-person services, and the economic and social impact it had on low income and vulnerable communities. During this reporting period, a total of 1,515,104 individuals were reached through community legal education, pro se assistance, referral information, and online outreach by Pro Bono Net’s IOLA-funded programs. Our programs also recruited over 150 new pro bono volunteers from nonprofits and legal aid organizations through our platforms, and supported 393 organizations across the state in delivering vital legal services to low income and vulnerable New Yorkers.

During the reporting period, 152,201 court forms and legal documents were assembled by litigants in New York using Pro Bono Net’s LawHelp Interactive program, including 10,289 Family Offense Petition (Order of Protection) forms. There were over 940,000 visits to LawHelpNY and the Crime Victims Legal Network (CVLN) during this reporting period. Our LiveHelp chat service provided information and attorney referral assistance to an average of 1,000 individuals a month during this reporting period, while 153 LiveHelp volunteers from 33 law schools contributed 5,999 hours of pro bono assistance.

During the grant period, our Immigration Advocates Network (IAN) provided referrals to 17,556 New Yorkers across their Immigration LawHelp, Citizenshipworks, and Immi platforms, and conducted trainings for staff and volunteers at organizations around New York on the use of Citizenshipworks. Over 100 New Yorkers completed N-400 forms through Citizenshipworks during the grant period. With the support of the New York State Office for New Americans, the IAN team began training Community Action Agencies throughout the state to use Citizenshipworks to assist immigrant clients with their citizenship applications and connect them to free remote legal services.

**Population Served:** General Low Income Populations

**Area Served:** Statewide

**Total IOLA Grant:** $550,000

**Staffing Full Time Equivalents:**
- Total Staff: 30
- Lawyers: 6
- Paralegals: 13
- Other: 11
Other Services: Overview

Through probono.net/ny, Pro Bono Net connects volunteer attorneys to community legal education through webinars, newsletters, calendars of training events, and other resources. Our online legal libraries provide pro bono attorneys with tools to quickly acquaint themselves with unfamiliar areas of law. The site also gives legal services organizations a platform through which they can promote volunteer opportunities and equip volunteers with resources to provide high quality pro bono assistance. In response to the ongoing disruption of place-based services, we continue to update our online Pro Bono Opportunities Guide with information about programs offering remote pro bono opportunities. The New York Pro Bono Opportunities Guide had over 10,000 pageviews during the reporting period.

Through LawHelpNY.org, we provide individuals with know-your-rights resources, self-help tools, court information, and attorney referral information. LawHelpNY also provides rapid access to resources for intake workers, hotline staff, and community organizations. Additionally LawHelpNY’s referral directory is now available via API to make it accessible on other websites that individuals visit for legal help.

Pro Bono Net’s LawHelp Interactive (LHI) platform allows low-income people without access to a lawyer to prepare their own legal forms online for free and gives overstretched attorneys a tool to improve their efficiency. LHI is also the backbone for many civil legal aid and court-based assistance programs in New York State and powers the New York Courts DIY forms program. In 2021, the Family Offense Petition program, a collaboration between LHI, the New York Courts, and DV agencies, helped over 10,289 DV survivors across the state. Additional, commonly used forms include those for consumer debt; family law, including child custody and support; and landlord-tenant issues. In total, LHI was used to complete 20,026 documents in the grant period. Additional pro se assistance provided by Pro Bono Net to New York residents during the grant year includes 44 immigrants who used Citizenworks to access a pathway to citizenship, 505 users of Remote Legal Connect, and 316 livechats hosted on the Crime Victims Legal Network platform.

| Number of People who Benefitted from Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Community Legal Education | 90 |
| Pro Se Assistance | 865 |
| Online Assistance | 1,231,465 |

1,232,420 People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation
Other Services: Overview

In addition, we continue to partner with JASA and the Center for Elder Law & Justice (CELJ) to expand usage of the Legal Risk Detector in New York, a legal issue-spotting and referral tool designed for use by social workers, medical personnel, and other professionals working with older Americans. We continue to work with CELJ to enhance and expand usage of the Senior Financial Safety Tool which was designed to help staff at community banking institutions and in community outreach settings educate older adults about the risk of financial exploitation, screen them for vulnerabilities, and refer them to legal services if needed. The Legal Risk Detector and the Senior Financial Safety tool expand preventative legal outreach and assistance to the disabled, homebound and other elderly populations who are difficult to reach through traditional legal services models.

Other Services: Technology and Other Innovations

To better serve the needs of the community, LawHelpNY engaged Message Agency to conduct a human-centered design review and analysis of the platform to evaluate the current experience of different user groups on LawHelpNY and develop and implement a comprehensive set of design and technical recommendations for a reimagined user experience. The vision was to provide a user friendly, easily accessible experience for LawHelpNY users to get the information they need, facilitated with a robust back-end infrastructure and taxonomy, a user experience that’s intuitive and agile on both desktop and mobile, a powerful search feature and results page, and streamlined workflows that enable content creators and managers to keep information current and accessible. This effort concluded in May 2021 after which an RFP was issued to build the new site based on the delivered prototype and designs.

With funding in part provided through a Legal Services Corporation technology initiative (TIG) grant awarded to LawNY, Pro Bono Net engaged Urban Insight, a software development shop with deep roots in the nonprofit legal community, to create the new LawHelpNY, using Drupal, an open source software and content management system. The new website uses best practices to realize significant usability and visual improvements, create a modern and replicable technology platform, create a foundation to support LawHelpNY’s content strategy, and implement best-in-class analytics and reporting systems. The grant included engaging Legal Service of the Hudson Valley to conduct a needs assessment and production of 10-15 new resources for LawHelpNY. The new site is scheduled to be launched in June 2022.
Other Services: Technology and Other Innovations

Furthermore, in 2021 Pro Bono Net adopted Galaxy Digital, a volunteer management software, to assist in managing volunteers as we expand our LiveHelp program. The adoption of Galaxy Digital was essential in meeting the demand of chat visitors using our LiveHelp chat button and was required for our program to move towards sustainability during the expansion. Galaxy Digital assists the LiveHelp program with volunteer supervision and management, including tasks like scheduling and pro bono hours tracking. In addition, volunteers have the capability to create individual profiles, which allows the LiveHelp program to communicate with and onboard volunteers. Pro Bono Net plans to allow other programs within the organization to access Galaxy Digital to help manage their volunteers.

Other Services: Trainings

Pro Bono Net provides regular trainings to partners on how to maximize their use of our platforms. Trainings are conducted one-on-one and as part of an ongoing webinar series for partners that covers topics relating to the intersection of technology and legal services.

LawHelpNY provides extensive training to volunteers who staff the LiveHelp chat service, primarily law students and law graduates. Volunteers receive training on navigating and finding information on LawHelpNY, CourtHelp, the Crime Victims Legal Help Network, as well as the difference between legal information and legal advice.

The LiveHelp Operator training consists of three initial onboarding sessions, as well as supplemental training videos. The three initial sessions consist of the following topics: (1) Session 1: Introduction to LiveHelp; (2) Session 2: Introduction to Comm100; and (3) Session 3: Introduction to Cultural Competency and Practice Chat. During the reporting period, our volunteers completed 573 trainings.

Within the first two weeks of beginning their first shift as a LiveHelp Operator, volunteers must view supplemental training videos that focus on specific legal topics. These legal categories include: (1) Housing Law, which includes TenantHelpNY; (2) Family Law, which include NY Crimes Victim Legal Network and Legal Information for Families Today; (3) CourtHelp and Foreclosure; and (4) NYSBA Unemployment Benefits.

Additionally, volunteers participate in a live online training with the Senior Program Associate that includes training on cultural competency and unconscious bias and webinars on the most common legal issues facing visitors to LawHelpNY. The Senior Program Associate sends ongoing feedback and training for the LiveHelp Operators via weekly email newsletter.
Other Services: Trainings

Through these emails, the Senior Program Associate incorporates program updates, tips on common questions and feedback on the chats that week. The Senior Program Associate provides training and supervision to law student externs who participate in short-term projects that support the growth and improvement of LiveHelp and LawHelpNY.

Through the Immigration Advocates Network (IAN), Pro Bono Net offers trainings through our Immigration Advocates Network Pro Bono and Nonprofit Resource Centers. We list trainings by location, so New York based volunteer lawyers can find in person trainings in their area. Over the course of the grant period IAN offered a number of online trainings and resources, including several to help legal service providers respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our free training webinars addressed trafficking, how to refer Citizenshipworks applicants for virtual (online) legal review, how to set up a virtual legal review project, and more. We published a comprehensive manual to help nonprofits and pro bonos offer virtual (or remote) legal review: Remote Legal Support: A Guide for Nonprofit and Pro Bono Innovation. We had more than 13,000 visits to our Nonprofit Resource Center and more than 600 visits to our Pro Bono Resource Center from New York based advocates, to access our trainings, calendar, alerts, and materials.

We served as trainers for several major pro bono-focused trainings in 2020. In addition, PBN staff served as trainers in Increasing Access to Safety for Victims: Remote Filing in New York State, by the NYS Office of Court Administration; and Technology Strategies for Remote Legal Assistance to Older Adults, hosted by the National Center on Law & Elder Rights. In addition, we co-designed and supported the design and implementation of programming offered for the New York legal services community by the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice, the NYS IOLA Fund and NYSTech Committee, and our staff attended several national conferences during the grant period, speaking as experts in the field, including: Statewide (New York) Civil Legal Aid Tech Conference; ABA/NLADA Equal Justice Conference; Pro Bono Institute Annual Conference; NLADA Annual Conference; NYSBA Annual Meeting; LSC Innovations in Technology Conference; and others.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

Pro Bono Net recruits, trains and deploys pro bono attorneys and non-attorney volunteers in a number of ways. The LiveHelp program of LawHelpNY relies exclusively on volunteers to staff the chat service. Volunteers are typically seeking to fulfill the 50 hour pro bono requirement for admission to the New York State Bar. The majority of our LiveHelp volunteers are law students or recent law graduates, though we occasionally have volunteers who are barred attorneys, both in New York and beyond. LiveHelp draws on approximately 150 volunteers, annually, to ensure adequate coverage of the bilingual LiveHelp service Monday to Friday 9am to 9pm. Although our volunteers do not offer legal advice or services, they provide critical assistance to site visitors seeking help with questions about issues such as court procedure, rental vouchers, or seeking free or low cost attorney referrals.

Probono.net/ny offers a range of tools that support and facilitate the work of pro bono volunteers. Pro bono attorneys use probono.net/ny’s seven practice areas to find volunteer opportunities, training materials, a calendar of local training events, and other support services that make it easier to get involved. These tools also increase the capacity of legal services providers to train and recruit volunteers, circulate available cases and communicate with their volunteers. In addition, the Pro Bono Resource Center of the Immigration Advocates Network supports more than 300 pro bono members in New York. We also updated the New York Pro Bono Opportunities Guide with information about programs offering remote volunteer opportunities.

Throughout this reporting period, Pro Bono Net’s staff also served as trainers in webinars and events focusing on the use of technology to expand access to assistance during the pandemic. Notable trainings we participated in with a strong pro bono focus include Current and Emerging Issues in Disaster Response: Legal Strategies and Practices for Helping Survivors by the Practising Law Institute; A Justice Collaborative: How Seven Organizations Responded to the COVID-19 Eviction Crisis, by the Legal Services Corporation; Live, Learn, Pivot: Making Disaster Preparedness and Relief More Equitable by the Pro Bono Institute.

Combined, these trainings reached more than 1,000 pro bono attorneys and pro bono program managers.

| 153 Law Students volunteered | 5,999 hours |
Significant Collaborations

All of PBN’s programs are developed in collaboration with direct legal services and other justice partners, ensuring a more coordinated and strategic allocation of resources, greater participation by volunteer attorneys and lay advocates, and shared technology investments that can readily be scaled and adopted statewide. Pro Bono Net’s collaborations and collaborative achievements are detailed below:

**LawHelpNY Advisory Committee:** City Bar Justice Center, Legal Services NYC, Legal Aid Society of New York City, Volunteers of Legal Service, Empire Justice Center, Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York, New York State Bar Association, Legal Assistance of Western NY, Legal Services of the Hudson Valley, the Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York, and New York Legal Assistance Group.

**LiveHelp:** During this reporting period, LawHelpNY continued its LiveHelp partnership with the New York Courts and Legal Information for Families Today for the provision of LiveHelp live chat assistance on the Families and Children section of the CourtHelp website and Foreclosure section. LawHelpNY collaborated with Empire Justice Center and LIFT to refresh training materials for volunteer operators in the areas of housing, family law, and public benefits. LiveHelp continues to be one of the widest-reaching legal live chat programs nationally.

**TenantHelpNY Partners:** Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York, Nassau Suffolk Law Services, Legal Aid of Western New York, Legal Aid Society of Mid New York, Erie County Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project, Legal Services of Hudson Valley, and Pro Bono Net.

**Crime Victims Legal Network (CVLN):** Program partners are Empire Justice Center and the Center for Human Services Research at the University at Albany, State University of New York. Advisory Committee members include the Center for Elder Law & Justice, Neighborhood Legal Services, In Your Own Voices, Legal Assistance of Western New York, Schuyler County District Attorney’s Office, The Legal Project, NYS Judicial Committee on Women in the Courts, and Disability Rights New York.

**Family Offense Petition Partners:** Since 2021, PBN staff continues to support nonprofit groups seeking to join the broad network of advocates helping victims of violence secure protection orders through the LHI platform. In fall 2021, we worked with the NYS Courts to organize an advocate training for Family Offense Petition Program users. The training was open to 1) court-approved advocates who wanted a refresher on how the program works and 2) organizations interested in learning about the program and how to become a court-approved advocate. Over 150 people attended and the recording has been viewed over 150 times since published.
**Significant Collaborations**

**Immigration Advocates Network New York Partners:** On immigration issues, Pro Bono Net partners with the Brooklyn Public Library and New Americans Campaign partners (including Dominicanos USA, Gay Men’s Health Crisis, the International Rescue Committee, and others) to host monthly technology-based naturalization events using Citizenshipworks.

**Remote Legal Connect (RLC):** During the reporting period, we hosted the first virtual roundtable for Remote Legal Connect partners, with participation from Legal Information for Families Today and Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York.

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**Sources of Funding**

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