Our target population is low-income people in Western New York (WNY). We continued to work with the programs in WNY to provide better coordinated and more cost-effective services to clients. We represented 36 non-profit/small business organizations and we provided information and referral services to 4,026 more individuals. We provided services in 766 immigration cases and closed 430 of them. IOLA’s support helped us continue to be the largest provider of free immigration legal services in New York State, outside of New York City.

Our case work secured direct financial benefits of $183,499.06 (lump) and $90,296.00 (monthly), while also achieving indirect financial benefits of $785,767.48 (lump) $4,120.00 (monthly) for our clients. Our work also saved taxpayers and estimated $969,131.70. Even during a pandemic, 167 pro bono lawyers worked on 389 cases benefitting 816 people, helping us leverage services for more clients. Overall, our work benefitted 7,130 people.

We collaborated with Say Yes Buffalo to develop nine (9) live/interactive virtual Know Your Rights presentations. The sessions were presented live to 4,609 attendees and have been viewed by an additional 2,568 people on our social media outlets and website. Moreover, our own outreach committee created a Know Your Rights multi-part short informational video series on a variety of legal topics that were posted on our social media pages.

We significantly improved our capacity to deliver services by implementing a new case management system, LegalServer. With the use of this comprehensive case management system, we have streamlined many of our processes, gained the ability to more accurately capture and report data, and have been able to conduct intakes at our community-based clinic locations. Additionally, we implemented windows 365 and SharePoint, allowing us to move all our work into the cloud; thereby, making it accessible to our employees working remotely or at community clinic locations.

**Population Served:** Low Income Populations

**Area Served:** Erie and Genesee County

**Total IOLA Grant:** $362,028.11

**Staffing Full Time Equivalents:**
- Total Staff: 45
- Lawyers: 26
- Paralegals: 8
- Other: 11
Direct Legal Services: Cases

**Family Law:**
Our client wanted to obtain guardianship over his teenage cousin who had recently lost her father. The child was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and she came to the U.S. with her father and her cousin in 2009. Her mother, who was never in the child's life, was believed to be in Uganda. The client was a perfect guardian. He had been in the child's life since birth. He and his wife are involved in the child's life and have provided a stable, loving home. The court agreed he was a suitable guardian and awarded him temporary guardianship until his cousin turns 18, giving him the legal right to care for his minor cousin.

**Consumer/Finance:**
We were contacted by two other legal services organizations seeking assistance in an unfortunate bankruptcy case. Specifically, a local funeral director stole over $500,000.00 in clients' pre-need burial funds. The funeral director was charged criminally and filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy for both himself and his business. The victims required assistance filing claims in the bankruptcy case because without representation, there was a chance that the debts owed these individuals may either be discharged completely or that the individuals will join the very large pool of unsecured creditors and may get pennies on the dollar. Our client was a low-income, elderly woman who was taken advantage of. We recruited a volunteer attorney to assist with this matter. The volunteer filed a claim on behalf of our client in the bankruptcy case and obtained a stipulation and agreed order deeming the debt non-dischargeable which gives the client the ability to pursue her claim for the stolen funds in State court.
Other Services: Overview

Because courts were shut down for several months during this contract, there was little people could do pro se. However, our Housing Helpline, designed to assist tenants facing eviction, was able to assist 99 people during this time. Also, our remote Pro Se Assistance Program, assisting litigants proceeding in Federal Court Pro Se, provided advice and counsel to 45 people proceeding Pro Se in Federal Court Civil matters. Finally, our Family Court Help Desk, which provides same day advice and counsel to parties with family court cases, helped 631 people during this time.

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

18,207 People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation

Other Services: Trainings

During the reporting period, our staff attended over 130 CLE presentations. Additionally, we offered a diversity training to all staff members covering Microaggressions in the Workplace. We also provided several wellness trainings through our Employee Assistance Program. We have a committee system in both offices that work on office-wide initiatives. Our Diversity and Inclusion committee has also been busy in getting training opportunities out to staff members and holding monthly discussion groups where a pre-determined topic is raised through a short article and a podcast and then staff are invited to discuss. This period, we started the planning stages of a comprehensive attorney training program for new hires and have focused much attention on providing internal trainings to support staff to hone their legal knowledge and issue spotting skills. Moreover, we have provided training to our entire staff on our new case management system, LegalServer.
Other Services: Technology and Other Innovations

This contract year, we continued upgrading our systems and network to operate in a remote setting and to give our staff and volunteers the resources they need to help as many clients as possible. In July 2021, we successfully launched our LegalServer case management system. LegalServer allows us to conduct on-site intakes at legal clinics, provides remote access to client files, gives our pro bono volunteers a direct conduit to cases in need of pro bono attorney representation, allows us to error-proof systems, and is endlessly customizable. Moreover, we utilized Microsoft 365 to develop a Microsoft Form for our tax program which permits clients to fill out a tailored form explaining their legal issue. The completed form is sent directly to our Tax Attorney and Tax Paralegal who can then contact the potential client. This was our first test of a potential online intake system prior to our use of LegalServer. Part of the LegalServer functionality includes a dedicated online intake site that links directly to our case management system. We are in the process of building out our online intake site and hope to have that operational in 2023.

Impact Cases

We represented a nonprofit organization whose mission is to develop a high quality, accessible, cost-effective wrap around continuum of care system for chemically addicted clients addressing prevention, treatment, recovery, education, housing, training, and research services. This period, we assisted the organization in obtaining 501(c) (3) status. We estimate that approximately one thousand people will benefit annually from the work of this organization.

We represented a nonprofit organization whose mission is to provides direct support for undocumented migrants and their families and accompanies detainees to court appearances. We work very closely with this organization as they help us coordinate care for our clients when they are released from detention. Often our clients have no resources upon release and this organization assists with clothing, food, transportation, and housing. They also advocate for better conditions for detained people. We assisted this organization with drafting their bylaws and in obtaining 501(c) (3) status. We estimate that at least fifty people will benefit from this organization annually.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

Our program is acutely focused on volunteer involvement. Even during the global pandemic, we involved 167 attorneys in pro bono representation of 389 of our clients, benefiting 816 people. We have a pro bono attorney panel which takes traditional pro bono model referrals for individual clients and small not for profit groups. Other attorneys volunteer with our (newly remote) limited scope projects: the Attorney of the Morning Program (eviction defense at Buffalo City Court and HUB Court); Family Court Help Desk currently serving all counties in the 8th JD; and Federal Court Pro Se Assistance Program. We screen all clients for eligibility and all cases for merit. We track case progress and look for issues that the attorneys might need help with. We provide training, mentors, and technical assistance. Our volunteers include attorneys, law graduates, law students, and undergraduate students. They help coordinate our limited scope projects, conduct client intakes, work on case files, and represent clients. We worked with the 8th Judicial District Pro Bono Committee (which is Co-Chaired by the Administrative Judge for the 8th Judicial District) and other providers to raise awareness of pro bono and to recruit pro bono attorneys throughout the 8-county district.

During this reporting period we ran the 2nd cohort of our successful Matrimonial Mentoring program in which experienced Matrimonial attorneys act as mentors and volunteer to take a case and handle it with a younger attorney (mentee) to teach the mentee how to properly handle a matrimonial case. Once the initial case is handled, the mentee is required to take a new pro bono matrimonial case on their own. We had 30 mentors and mentees involved in this year’s program. Additionally, we held 10 CLEs covering the following substantive areas: (1) Housing; (2) Federal Practice; (3) Family Law; (4) Tax; (5) Immigration; and (6) Microaggressions in the Workplace.

When attorneys attend our CLE programs, they are agreeing to either take a case from us or staff a help desk shift. We recruited 92 volunteer attorneys through this practice.

605 Attorneys volunteered 3,593 hours

27 Law Students volunteered 2,929 hours

20 Other Volunteers volunteered 1,175 hours
Significant Collaborations

- **Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP):** We partnered with Belmont Housing, Center for Elder Law and Justice (CELJ), Neighborhood Legal Services (NLS), Western New York Law Center (WNYLC), and Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo (LABB) in a project to assist Erie County tenants in applying for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program to pay for rental arrears accumulated as a result of the COVID pandemic. We served 80 people and overall over $46 million in rental arrears was paid in Erie County.

- **Western New York Eviction Prevention Project (WNY EPP):** We partnered with NLS, CELJ, WNYLC and LABB to create the Western New York Eviction Prevention Project. This project provides eviction defense representation to tenants in Erie, Niagara, Orleans, Wyoming, and Genesee Counties. This program will provide legal representation to thousands of tenants who previously had little to no access to legal services.

- **Erie County HUB Court:** We also worked on a joint committee with the courts to create an eviction HUB Court in Erie County. This court consolidates all 36 Erie County town and village court Landlord Tenant (L&T) calendars into one part heard virtually in Buffalo City Court. The consolidation allows us and the other 4 civil legal services providers in Buffalo (NLS, CELJ and LABB) to staff the court every day and provide representation to tenants who otherwise would not have access to representation. Additionally, the same hearing officer is now hearing all L&T cases in Erie County, providing consistency of outcomes across the county.

- **8th JD Access to Justice:** We continued to participate in the 8th Judicial District’s Access to Justice Committee. The committee brings together all legal services providers in the 8th Judicial District to discuss ongoing initiatives.

- **GAL Committee:** We are working with NLS and CELJ to create a Guardian ad Litem (GAL) program for Erie County eviction proceedings modeled after the NYC GAL program. This committee is still in early stages, but we hope to launch a program early next year.

- **Rural Justice Taskforce:** We have been working with the Office of Court Administration’s Rural Justice Taskforce to create virtual court access networks in rural areas of the state where litigants can both participate in their court cases and connect to legal services providers.

- **Legal Services Coalition:** Our Executive Director was appointed to the Board of Directors for the Legal Services Coalition, a statewide group of civil legal services providers.
Significant Collaborations

- **Afghani Asylum Project:** We have been working with the five (5) resettlement agencies in Buffalo to help the 600 Afghans who were brought to Buffalo after the fall of Afghanistan.

- **Virtual Court Access Network (VCAN):** Finally, as an outgrowth of both the HUB Court and the WNY EPP, we are working on a third committee with the courts to create a Virtual Court Access Network (VCAN) site in a public library in Arcade, NY which sits on the boarder of Erie and Wyoming Counties. Our goal is that this site will allow litigants who live in rural areas of both counties to access the courts and civil legal services virtually, thereby increasing access to justice for rural litigants.

Sources of Funding

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<th>Source</th>
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<tr>
<td>City and County Funding</td>
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