Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A
2021-2022

Overview of Achievements

Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A ("Brooklyn A") advances social and economic justice and community empowerment through innovative, collaborative, neighborhood-based legal representation and advocacy. We address the myriad systemic issues facing our communities by providing a combination of legal assistance, including full legal representation, brief advice/services, advocacy, and community education, to vulnerable populations—including the low-income working poor, the unemployed or underemployed, the disabled, seniors, families in crisis, community-based organizations ("CBOs"), and small businesses owned by women, immigrants, and people of color throughout New York City ("NYC"). Our clients live in rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods where many residents and small business owners have been displaced or are facing displacement and harassment. We focus our work in three program areas: Consumer & Economic Advocacy ("CEA"), Community & Economic Development ("CED"), and Preserving Affordable Housing ("PAH"). The efficacy of our work is enhanced through close collaborations with other CBOs, coalitions, elected officials, and advocacy groups.

During the IOLA 2021-22 grant year, we have continued to advance our affirmative model of litigation and organizing, ensuring that we reach as many individuals as possible in the communities we serve. We partnered with four CBOs, advocacy partners, housing agencies, and faith-based institutions and actively represented 24 tenant associations, and served over 500 families, totaling more than 2,000 individuals across Brooklyn. When representing clients, we use every possible tool at our disposal to affirm their rights and keep them in their homes—from organizing a building and bringing neighbors together to face their individual and collective struggles as a team, as well as bringing buildings with the same ownership together, to bringing housing cases in local, state, and federal courts, and bringing discrimination complaints to appropriate city agencies whenever necessary. We have brought 961 cases in city, state, and federal courthouses and formal complaints to city agencies. Through Know-Your-Rights workshops and community presentations with our partner organizations, we have served over 718 residents.

Population Served: Low Income Populations

Area Served: Kings County

Total IOLA Grant: $49,077.88

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:
- Total Staff: 98
- Lawyers: 55
- Paralegals: 10
- Other: 33
Housing:
A client came to Brooklyn A seeking legal assistance in filing bankruptcy, after being unable to get a modification due to an outstanding lien situation. The client is Black and lives with her disabled daughter and disabled husband. Due to inaction in state court, the home was going to be sold at a foreclosure auction.

Brooklyn A filed bankruptcy to stop the sale and filed for loss mitigation to get a modification. We represented the homeowner in extensive litigation to get rid of the liens that were incumbering the property and a hinderance on the modification. After getting rid of the liens, we were able to secure an affordable modification and allow the client and her family to remain at the property. The homeowner received a chapter 7 discharge and discharged several unsecured consumer debts.

2,560 people benefitted from 1,201 legal cases closed

Cases by Legal Problem Area

- Consumer / Finance: 10%
- Housing: 90%
Direct Legal Services: Cases

Housing:
A client came to Brooklyn A in December 2020 owing to $12,062.60 in rent arrears with no ability to pay her rent going forward. A nonpayment eviction case had been commenced against her in October 2020. She resides with her 74-year-old mother, who is diabetic and high risk for severe illness or death from COVID-19, and her teenage son. She is the sole source of income for her household.

The client began to fall behind in her rent payments in March 2020. Prior to pandemic, she had been working as a babysitter for two different families; however, both of these families had to layoff the client in April 2020 due to COVID-19 transmission concerns. As a result, the client applied for and began collecting unemployment benefits in mid-April 2020.

The client found part-time employment in November 2020 through a temp agency working as a direct support worker at a rehabilitation facility. Because the client was not bringing in enough income through the temp agency job, she continued to collect unemployment benefits until approximately mid-February 2021. In mid-February 2021, she was on-boarded as an employee at the above-noted rehabilitation facility and was allotted more hours of work each week.

In summer 2021, Brooklyn A assisted the client in applying for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP). She was approved for ERAP assistance in the amount of $22,996.50 in September 2021. As she still had rent arrears on her account, we then assisted her in applying for a One-Shot Deal. She was approved for the One-Shot Deal in the amount of $2,996.50. We then assisted the client to apply and get approved for CityFHEPS, a rent subsidy program. The client’s rent is $1,522.50 per month. As of December 2021, the CityFHEPS program now pays $860.47 of the monthly rent, leaving the client to pay $662.03 per month toward her rent going forward.

Brooklyn A was able to get the nonpayment eviction case discontinued by stipulation in December 2021.
Other Services: Overview

Our CEA Program not only helps consumers resolve their issues when legal action has already taken place but also when legal action is merely looming on the horizon. For example, some homeowners suffer temporary hardships and, if they seek help immediately, their issues can be resolved before any court proceeding takes place. These temporary hardships can include issues such as unexpected medical expenses, essential home repairs, or a non-paying tenant. We also continue to help homeowners negotiate mortgage deferrals due to the pandemic and provide educational outreach to homeowners to prevent or remove liens and levies.

Our CED Program regularly refers matters requiring special expertise to pro bono counsel at private law firms. In the reporting period, we worked with three pro bono law firms – Akerman, Strook & Strook & Lavan, and Arnold & Porter on several matters. We also continue to host an externship program with Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP in which corporate associates from the firm are rotated into for 4-month cycles to work full time within our CED Program.

Our PAH Program's model of group representation requires extensive outreach and research of new client cases and which situations might warrant representation or advocacy. In the past year, we have conducted and virtually participated 15 know-your-rights workshops and 31 educational and community presentations. These presentations allow us to expand our client base and inform our communities of the services we provide.

In total, we reached 4,443 New Yorkers through 72 community legal education outreach sessions, provided more than 4,000 residents pro se assistance, and reached 25,000 people via online outreach.

| Number of People who Benefitted from Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Community Legal Education       | 4,443                         |
| Pro Se Assistance               | 4,513                         |
| Online Assistance               | 25,427                        |

34,383 People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation
Other Services: Technology and Other Innovations

Our use of Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and Skype allows us to continue client outreach, intake, and representation efficiently and effectively, which was essential during a year in which much of our client interaction took place virtually. We have also expanded our use of tools such as DocuSign and GoTo to ensure our programs continue running smoothly.

In August 2021 we launched the use of LegalServer as our new client management system. The implementation of this system was the culmination of a two-year process that involved contributions from virtually all staff across each of our departments. It has allowed us to more accurately capture and facilitate case management, pro bono referrals, outreach, and education efforts. All staff have been trained in the new software.

Other Services: Trainings

All Brooklyn A staff members have access to continuing legal education courses with the Practicing Law Institute. All staff, including managers, are encouraged to attend professional development training courses.

During April 2021 staff attended a virtual training called “Foundations of Trauma-Informed Lawyering” presented by Nicole Fidler, Director of Pro Bono Program at Sanctuary for Families, and Hamra Ahmad, Director of Law and Policy at Her Justice. The training covered the signs of and approaches to working with survivors of trauma. As an organization that works with many survivors of Domestic and Interpersonal Violence, this training was quite valuable.

In September 2021, staff participated in the training “How Mindfulness Can Help You Avoid Legal Burnout, Continue to Competently Perform Legal Services, and Remain Ethically Compliant” presented by Cynthia Sharp, Esq. and Rebecca Howlett, J.D., C.P.T of the Legal Burnout Solution. In November 2021, the same presenters provided the staff training “Learning Mindfulness to Curtail Implicit Bias and Make Ethical Decisions.”

Additional trainings on professional/personal values, compassion fatigue, negotiations, bankruptcy, client communications, effective brief advice, nonprofit agreements, commercial lease analysis, foreclosure and statute of limitations, defending older adults from home equity theft, federal updates to COVID-19 relief options, New York State HAF training, representing domestic violence survivors in IRS disputes, consumer bankruptcy practice, implicit bias, and rent abatement.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

For recruitment, we send intern postings to all major law schools in the area, in addition to platforms with a national reach; thus, we receive applications from law students both locally and nationally.

Our basic training for all staff, law student interns, and volunteers is the same, depending on which kind of casework the individual will complete. Everyone receives training on our case management system, conducting client intakes, and how to complete critical forms, such as power of attorney. This training also includes guidance on how to properly handle client files that contain sensitive information and keep records of time spent on work.

All Brooklyn A programs worked with a talented group of law student interns and volunteers during the reporting period. Under the supervision of our staff attorneys and program directors, these interns and volunteers worked on matters including preparing discovery demands in bankruptcy cases, drafting motions, and representing clients in nonpayment and holdover cases. This work is extremely helpful to our attorneys. Notable schools from which our interns came include Cardozo Law, Baruch College, Fordham, and Washington University in St. Louis.

Our CED Program is proud of its Simpson Thacher Bartlett LLP Externship, which is now in its 13th year. As part of the program, we host an associate with corporate transactional experience (usually a 2nd to 5th-year associate) for a 4-5-month rotation who works in the unit full time. The extern works on a wide variety of client matters ranging from non-litigation commercial lease matters for small business clients, the initial formation of start-up nonprofit organizations, to complex real estate and project finance transactions for affordable housing developers. During the reporting period, we worked with two externs.

Organizationally, we received pro bono assistance from three additional law firms. These firms assisted in immigration and various labor and employment matters.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hours</th>
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<tr>
<td>5 Attorneys</td>
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<td>21 Law Students</td>
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Significant Collaborations

Our CEA program continues to work closely with NHS Brooklyn, a CBO that provides various services to homeowners and tenants in NYC, including helping homeowners save their properties. We and NHS Brooklyn have partnered at various virtual community education and outreach events. We’ve also increased our homeowner outreach in Queens, where we provide anti-displacement workshops in a coalition that includes the Center for New York City Neighborhoods, NHS Queens, NHS Jamaica, and JASA.

We and NHS Brooklyn also have a referral partnership. NHS Brooklyn refers many clients to us who need assistance with filing bankruptcy and saving their homes through loss mitigation procedure in the bankruptcy courts. We have helped many NYC residents save their homes in bankruptcy proceedings, and many of them were referred by NHS Brooklyn. During the grant period, we also strengthened our referral relationships with the New York City Bar Association, the Brooklyn Bar Association, Grow Brooklyn, Communities Resist, MHANY, City Bar Justice Center, and Queens Legal Services.

Our CED Program has expanded its Save Small Business, Save New York initiative, which is a collaborative racial, economic, and immigrant justice program of Brooklyn A, Volunteers for Legal Service, and TakeRoot Justice. 70% of small business owners served by our collaborative program are Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC). Beyond the direct benefits to our clients, local communities benefit as these businesses are essential providers of goods and services and are an important part of the social, cultural, and economic infrastructure of our NYC’s neighborhoods. The group provides access to experienced transactional lawyers to provide high-quality legal advice and representation to community-initiated and -controlled development efforts in low-income and BIPOC communities. The collaborative also works with the Asian American Federation, Chhaya Community Development Corporation, and Cooper Square Development Committee, each of whom works closely with BIPOC business owners in their communities.

Our PAH Program team continues to actively participate in the Right to Counsel Coalition. One deputy director works on the attorney pipeline initiative, which works with law schools to encourage students to go into tenant advocacy work. We also collaborated with Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation, St. Nicks Alliance, the Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, and the Human Rights Administration. We have been working side by side with these and other community partners for decades as thought partners and, in many cases, helping them navigate through the complex legal aspects of their work in empowering communities.
Significant Collaborations

Brooklyn A is also a member of LEAP, a membership coalition comprised of direct civil legal services providers serving the low-income communities of New York City. The LEAP member organizations work to increase the availability of quality civil legal services for low-income New Yorkers. LEAP supports diversity and innovation in organizational models, delivery systems and methodology and specifically recognizes the need to maintain community-based service delivery. In the grant period, LEAP continued its robust training series for its members’ staff attorneys – several of these trainings were taught by Brooklyn A staff.

Sources of Funding

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<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tr>
<td>IOLA Grant</td>
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<td>State Funding</td>
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