Overview of Achievements

The Legal Project has always prided itself on serving low- and moderate-income residents of the Capital Region using cost-effective and innovative strategies in the provision of legal services. Over the past few years, those strategies have truly put to the test as we have started to emerge from a global pandemic and move forward with a “new normal.” We used the COVID-19 Pandemic as an opportunity to look at the way we provide legal services and develop and implement more efficient means to assist clients. For example, we reduced our office footprint by about one third total square footage, resulting in a significant cost savings for the organization. This was made possible by studying lessons learned about our work, efficiency, and our client’s needs during the pandemic, leading to improvements in our work-at-home policies.

In reviewing our various systems and procedures to provide more efficient legal services, we suspended our pro bono bankruptcy quarterly clinics. Instead, we have streamlined the process immensely with triaging the clients directly over the phone on the first call and obtaining them advice at legal clinic fairly quickly over the phone or via zoom with a pro bono attorney. Essentially taking out an entire step in our previous process. This has increased the clients satisfactory rating of our program also dramatically reduced the number of no-show appointments significantly. Our Domestic Violence Program also reviewed their procedures for efficiency and implanted significant changes to better serve clients. The Supervising Attorney and Program Manager spent a great deal of time identifying priorities for consults and how the different matters should be seen in regard to timelines of appointments and as result the program was able to schedule consults more quickly and reduce wait times.

During this reporting period, have provided legal advice and representation to nearly 2000 residents of the Capital Region utilizing staff and pro bono attorneys. We have provided legal information to over 4000 individuals using both on-person and virtual platforms on various legal topics that are pertinent to our clients. Due to the efforts of our staff and pro bono attorneys we achieved nearly $400,000 of back awards and settlements to our clients and saved them over $55,000 in potential costs and fees.

Population Served: Low Income Women and Families

Area Served: 4-County Area in Eastern New York

Total IOLA Grant: $240,178

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:
- Total Staff: 29.9
- Lawyers: 15.7
- Paralegals: 4.5
- Other Staff: 9.7

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Direct Legal Services: Cases

Family:
We assisted a client in Albany County secure a Judgment of Divorce from her spouse. There was a long history of abuse in their marriage, the physical violence was so severe that he went to prison for puncturing her lungs and breaking her ribs. When she first contacted us, she was extremely afraid of pursuing the divorce and breaking free from him, she even explained that she was “wisy waisy”. It took her a few attempts to go forward and decide that she was ready to tackle her fear and pursue the divorce. The Staff Attorneys helped with safety planning and how to slowly limit herself while he was incarcerated. He put her in major financial debit. The bill collectors kept coming after her, she was trying to pay some of his loans, but couldn’t keep up on them all. The bank told her she had to pay because of a home equity loan. The attorney that assisted her secured her premarital home, along with erasing all the home equity of loan for $24,000.
Direct Legal Services: Cases

Human Trafficking/Immigration:
Client X was granted T non-immigrant status (trafficking visa) in February 2022. Client X was “adopted” (not lawfully) in Haiti when she was under age 5, over 35 years ago, and brought to the US by her “adoptive” parents. In 1996 to 1997, when client X was just 16 years old, her “adoptive” parents trafficked her by forcing her to work as a domestic servant in the homes of others. Beyond this trafficking experience, client X endured a truly horrible life of abuse by her adoptive parents, relatives, spouse, and strangers. She had two birth certificates and two names and birth dates, muddling her identity. She had been represented by attorneys in the past and had various immigration petitions submitted for her over the years but had never obtained any lasting form of immigration status despite living almost all of her life in the United States. She was understandably traumatized by all that she lived through.

Our Staff Attorney was undaunted and successfully late-renewed client X’s Temporary Protected Status, which had expired 10 years before. She then took action in two cases to open a pathway to Lawful Permanent Residency: she filed a request to re-open a closed Haitian Refugee Immigrant Fairness Act (HRIFA) application previously submitted by client X, as well as applying anew for T non-immigrant status. For T non-immigrant status, an applicant must prove that their current physical presence in the U.S. in on account of trafficking. When there is a large gap in time between the occurrence of the trafficking and the application, this element can be very difficult to meet. Fortunately, the application was successful and the T non-immigrant application was approved! While generally T non-immigrants must wait 3 years before applying for Lawful Permanent Residence, our Staff Attorney was able to obtain the law enforcement letter needed for an early application within one month after the T non-immigrant approval; An application for Client X for Lawful Permanent Residence has been submitted. After over 35 years, Client X now has a clear path to becoming a Lawful Permanent Resident and citizen of the US, the only country she ever remembers living in.
Other Services: Overview

Our staff attorneys develop and conduct free Continuing Legal Education (CLE) programs or other free trainings to the community. Many times these trainings are conducted in collaboration with community partners and are provided both in-person and Zoom.

Legally Speaking Workshops offer free, custom designed education programs to community groups and organizations on a wide variety of legal topics. Each workshop is tailored to the requesting group’s needs and is provided by either a staff or pro bono attorney.

<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>
</tbody>
</table>

9,389 People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation

Other Services: Technology and Other Innovations

We worked with our IT company and implemented a new UniFi Wi-Fi system that was installed to provide better tech outreach and access. In utilizing technology for the provision of legal services almost constantly throughout the work day, we recognized that and upgrade our system to ensure that our system can handle the volume of users and services that we are using each day was necessary.

In addition, we have purchased a new case management system, LegalServer and have been working on this project for the past year. We have assembled an internal onboarding team and have regular meetings with our LegalServer Onboarding specialist to create a case management system that will more suit our needs for case management, reporting, timekeeping, outreach, clinics, and pro bono attorney management. We will be going “live” with our new site during the next reporting period and can report successes accordingly.
Other Services: Trainings

The Legal Project encourages all employees to continue to learn and develop in their professional journeys. One way of doing this is to make sure that employees and board members receive information about upcoming trainings being offered which may be of interest. For employees, work time is allowed to participate in trainings, and when possible costs are covered out of organizational funds. We also ask employees about what kind of trainings they would like to see. If we have the talent and expertise to provide trainings in house, we can do so, otherwise we can investigate bringing in trainers or collaborating with other organizations who have the expertise. For board members, we encourage professional board development through Board Source, Blue Avocado, and NYCON. Employees have the PLI Network available, at no cost, on demand, in addition to state, federal, and community partner trainings.

In this past reporting period, the Human Trafficking Victims Program (HTVP) has increased its initiative regarding trauma-informed lawyering and trauma stewardship geared toward primarily civil legal service attorneys as well as trainings to attorneys, service providers, law enforcement, and medical and mental health providers on topics that include Identifying Human Trafficking and Humanitarian Immigration Relief. In addition, Practitioners in the immigration unit attended webinars to stay on top of continued changes in law and policy, including webinars hosted by USCIC, CLINIC, ASISTA, NYIC, OVC and ONA among others. Giving the emerging and evolving political situations in Haiti, Afghanistan and Ukraine, many of the trainings focused on how to provide legal services to these immigrant populations.

Many of TLP’s Program Managers and Supervising Attorneys attended an OVS training on a Trauma Informed Supervision Practices that focused on an overview of trauma and all the different reactions one can have including, physical, cognitive, behavioral, spiritual and emotional. The training viewed the different ways that can affect individuals personally and in the workplace.

Our Domestic Violence Supervising Attorney and Legal Director Co-presented a virtual CLE for the New York Office if the Attorney General staff entitled "A Trauma Informed Approach to Handling Domestic Violence Cases in New York State Family Courts" that examined the ethical rules governing attorneys in NY as well as the concept of trauma informed lawyering and made a case that NY attorneys have an ethical obligation to apply principles of trauma informed lawyering when handling clients who have undergone significant trauma, including DV survivors.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

The Legal Project uses pro bono attorneys, law students and pro bono scholars, undergraduate interns and volunteers, paralegals, and other community volunteers in the provision of legal services. We are a recognized field placement for Albany Law School, and the other local Universities and many of our volunteers learn of our available opportunities through “word of mouth” by current and former volunteers. We employ a Pro Bono Coordinator who works with our Legal Director in the recruitment and training of pro bono attorneys. Our Legal Director provides mentoring and other support for our current volunteer attorneys. During this reporting period, we have provided training utilizing Zoom and a Youtube Channel as well as other recoding and streaming options which has provided convenience and ease for attorneys and community members.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>226 Attorneys volunteered</th>
<th>1,759 hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11 Law Students volunteered</td>
<td>3,607 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant Collaborations

We will highlight our achievement with Capital District Asylum Collaborative (CDAC), CDAC is a volunteer group comprised of medical and psychological practitioners at the Albany Med and medical students at Albany Medical School. In 2021, CDAC conducted 21 medical and psychological evaluations for clients of The Legal Project. CDAC provided pro bono expert medical and psychological affidavits for non-citizens in support of their VAWA petitions, U petitions and waiver applications. On 10/20/21, attorneys from The Legal Project participated in a training for incoming Albany Medical College students and physicians to the clinic to explain forms of humanitarian immigration relief and need for medical evaluations to support clients’ applications. This partnership has resulted in a strong collaborative that continues to serve increasing numbers of clients in the Capital Region each year.
Significant Collaborations

The most significant collaboration that the Human Trafficking Victims Legal Services Program at The Legal Project, Inc. has had, was with the Counter-Trafficking and Protection Unit of the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

As previously mentioned, The McNulty Veterans Business Center is a new collaboration that we are excited about and offers pro bono services, workshops for veteran, military owned businesses. This collaborative relationship includes the following services required for those income eligible veterans, service members, and military spouses to successfully operate and expand a business and to become financially successful.

Albany Law School Community & Economic Development Center: Small Business Legal Network Program, brief legal advice for small businesses and entrepreneurs. Primary collaborating partners for the Small Business Legal Network Clinic include Albany Law School and the Community Loan Fund of the Capital Region. Additional collaborators include Small Business Development Center and University at Albany Institute of Nonprofit Leadership and Community Development. New to the partnership, within the past six months, includes the S.T.E.A.M. Garden Albany and most recently SPARK Saratoga. These clinics are offered 9-10 times during the year, on a once per month basis. Participation in the Small Business Legal Network Clinic includes up to 5 NYS practicing business attorneys. During a single clinic we serve up to 25 small businesses. During the 9-10-month period we offer the clinics, we serve up to 250 Capital Region small businesses.

Sources of Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IOLA Grant</td>
<td>$240,178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Funding</td>
<td>$1,444,617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Funding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fundraising</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$2,238,911</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Federal 16%

IOLA Grant 11%

Other 4%

Fundraising 4%

State 65%